

VINOBA BHAVE

THE MAN AND HIS MISSION

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PREFACE

It is a melancholy reflection that Gandhism is fast disappearing from the land of Gandhi. Most people pay tributes to Gandhi and talk of Gandhism, but few practise it. In this surrounding gloom, however, there is one ray of hope and that is Vinoba. The light has gone out, and yet it still burns, though feebly. Gandhi's moral heir, Vinoba, is determined to keep it burning. This feeble flame has not effectively removed the darkness of despair and frustration from the country, yet it shows the right path to those who wish to tread it.

Vinoba today is a living symbol of Gandhism. He is following in the footsteps of his Master. He does not only pay tributes to Gandhi, but practises Gandhism most immaculately. He shows, by example, that Gandhism which is the philosophy of truth, love and non-violence, alone can save the world from the flames of war, hatred and greed. He, by his actions, demonstrates the potentialities of Gandhism and appeals to the people not to forget the message of the Mahatma.

This book contains articles from those who know Vinoba and understand his philosophy. Various aspects of his personality and achievements are portrayed in this little volume.

The Editor

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IDEAL SATYAGRAHI

By

MAHATMA GANDHI

[In October, 1940, the Congress launched a campaign of individual Satyagraha under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. He chose Shri Vinoba Bhave to be the first satyagrahi. Explaining the object and limitations of the movement and introducing Shri Vinoba, Gandhiji wrote in "Harijan":—]

I have had three days' discussion with the Working Committee. During it I unfolded my plan of civil disobedience in so far as I was able to envisage it. Although I have sole charge of the campaign, I could not think of taking the first step without consultation with the members of the Working Committee. In non-violent action one has to carry the co-workers with one through the mind and the heart. There is no other way to enforce discipline or obedience to instructions. I must admit that it was no plain sailing for me. There was stubborn dissent from two members. I tried hard to carry conviction to them but I fear I failed. They will, however, yield obedience so far as it is possible for them for the sake of discipline. The difference of opinion solely centred round the quantity of civil disobedience and the restriction with which it was hedged.

I disclose this part of the discussion to show that my plan will fall short of the expectations of those whom the dissenters represent. I would simply say to them, "Wait patiently and see what happens. Carry out instructions to the best of your ability. Do nothing to thwart the plan. If your reason rebels against it, you will serve the cause by seceding and educating the people along your own lines. That would be straight, brave and stimulating in that the

people will learn to appraise the value of different methods. You will cause confusion by preaching from the Congress platform anything contrary to the official programme, especially when the whole organization becomes like an army. It matters little whether one person offers civil disobedience or many. The rest have to render such support as they may be called upon to do."

The plan is simply this. Direct action will be commenced by Shri Vinoba Bhave and for the time being confined to him only. And since it is to be confined to individual civil disobedience and that too of him only, it will be so conducted by him as to exclude others directly or indirectly. But since it concerns freedom of speech the public will be involved to an extent. It is open to them either to listen to him or not.

But much will depend upon what the Government wish to do.

In spite of all attempts to confine civil disobedience to individuals and for the moment to one only, they can precipitate a crisis by making it a crime to listen to him or read anything written by him. But I think and believe that they do not want to invite though they hold themselves in readiness to cope with any trouble that may face them.

I have discussed with Shri Vinoba various plans so as to avoid all unnecessary friction or risk. The idea is to make all actions as strictly non-violent as is humanly possible. One man's non-violent action would be despised and ridiculed by the non-believer in it. In truth, while the effect of a given violent action can be reduced to mathematical terms that of non-violent action defies all calculation and has been known to falsify many that have been hazarded. How far I shall be able to present an example of unadulterated non-violence remains to be seen.

Who is Vinoba Bhave and why has he been selected? He is an undergraduate having left college after my return to India in 1915. He is a Sanskrit scholar. He joined the Ashram almost at its inception. He was among the first members. In order to better qualify himself he took one year's leave to prosecute further studies in Sanskrit. And practically at the same hour at which he left the Ashram a year before, he walked into it without notice. I had forgotten that he was due to arrive that day. He has taken part in every menial activity of the Ashram from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvellous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning in which he has specialized as very few have. He believes in universal spinning being the central activity which will remove the poverty in the villages and put life into their deadness. Being a born teacher, he has been of the utmost assistance to Asha Devi in her development of the Scheme of education through handicrafts. Shri Vinoba has produced a textbook taking spinning as the handicraft. It is original in conception. He has made scoffers realize that spinning is a handicraft par excellence which lends itself to being effectively used for basic education. He has revolutionized takli-spinning and drawn out its hitherto unknown possibilities. For perfect spinning probably he has no rival in all India.

He has abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. He believes in communal unity with the same passion that I have. In order to know the best mind of Islam, he gave one year to the study of the Quran in the original. He, therefore, learned Arabic. He found this study necessary for cultivating a living contact with the Muslims in his neighbourhood.

He has an army of disciples and workers who would rise to any sacrifice at his bidding. He is responsible for producing a young man who has

dedicated himself to the service of lepers. Though an utter stranger to medicine, this worker has by singular devotion mastered the method of treatment of lepers and is now running several clinics for their care. Hundreds owe their care to his labours. He has now published a handbook in Marathi for the treatment of lepers. Vinoba was for years Director of the Mahila Ashram in Wardha. His devotion to the cause of Daridranarayan took him first to a village near Wardha and now he has gone still further and lives in Pavnar, five miles from Wardha, from where he has established contact with villagers through the disciples he has trained.

He believes in the necessity of the political independence of India. He is an accurate student of history. But he believes that real independence of the villagers is impossible without the constructive programme of which khadi is the centre. He believes that the Charkha is the most suitable outward symbol of non-violence which has become an integral part of his life. He has taken an active part in the previous satyagraha campaigns. He has never been in the limelight on the political platform. With many co-workers he believes that silent constructive work with civil disobedience in the background is far more effective than the already heavily crowded political platform. And he thoroughly believes that non-violent resistance is impossible without a heart-belief in and practice of constructive work. Vinoba is an out and out war-resister, but he respects equally with his own the conscience of those who whilst not being out and out war-resisters, have yet strong conscientious objection to participation in the present war. Though Vinoba represents both the types I may want to select another who will represent only one type namely conscientious objection to participation in the present war.

It was necessary to introduce Vinoba at length to the public in order to justify my choice. This will

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perhaps be the last civil disobedience struggle which I shall have conducted. Naturally, I would want it to be as flawless as it can be. Moreover, the Congress has declared that it will avoid all avoidable embarrassments to the Government consistently with its own existence. For that reason too, I had to strive to produce the highest quality, irrespective of quantity.

AN INTERVIEW WITH SRI VINOBA

By

J. B. KRIPALANI

With his great erudition and Sadhana I have always considered Sri Vinoba as a great exponent of Gandhiji's philosophy and way of life. Many intellectuals consider me too as an exponent of Gandhiji's philosophy. For some time I have been wondering what it is that makes Sri Vinoba's interpretation different from mine. I have been conscious of the difference because it came out at some of the annual conferences of the Sarvodaya Samaj which we both attended. Personally we had met but rarely and on these occasions there was no discussion about our respective points of view. And so when he was in U.P. touring on his "Bhoomidan" mission, I sought the earliest opportunity to meet and have a talk with him. I met him twice, once at Ghaziabad on the 12th November 1951 and again in Delhi on the 13th. I would like to share with the public the talks I had on these two occasions. Vinobaji is a man of few words and perhaps does not usually express his views on public affairs freely. I had, therefore, to do most of the talking. However, on both occasions I insisted on his speaking and giving me a bit of his mind regarding my views.

My point of view, as I placed before him, was that I believed our present ills were largely due to our pinning faith on capitalist economy. Our leaders in the Government did toy for some time with the idea of a Socialist economy but they had to abandon it, for they realised that the Administration as it was constituted today could not take up the added burden of looking after the entire production and distribution of economic goods in the country. I

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told Shri Vinoba that I believed that capitalism today was a decaying creed. It could no more contribute to the material, moral and cultural advancement of humanity as it had done, in some measure, in its hey-days, that is, as against medieval feudalism. Even then, after a short while, it was kept going only by the expanding markets provided by imperialism and war. The same is the case today. The chief defect from which capitalism suffers, and must suffer, is that the purchasing power of the masses is unable to keep pace with the ever-increasing production made possible through the progressive application of science and technology. Therefore, capitalism is subject to periodical depressions brought about by the low purchasing power of the masses and a glut of goods that have some times to be destroyed to keep up prices at a "remunerative" level for the capitalist. Even so, capitalist economy is kept going by war production. War and war preparations have become chronic these days. If economic life is to be put on an equalitarian basis it can be done only through a co-ordinated and balanced economy. This co-ordination and balance must embrace both agriculture and industry. Gandhiji's plan of the revival and revitalisation of the village on the basis of regional economy, suitable to present conditions, aims at a peaceful solution of the economic problem. An alternative solution would be through Communism. But Communism could solve the economic problem only through political and economic dictatorship which, in its wake, would bring other evils. Besides, dictatorship, in the very nature of things, can be but a temporary device in an emergent situation. It cannot provide a permanent solution consistent with the modern man's urge for some freedom to regulate his own life.

I also said that in recently-freed colonial countries, with a vast population and limited acreage of

land, capitalist economy in its decadent phase will not be able to solve the problem of supply of even the barest needs of the people. China, for instance, would not be able to provide for the primary needs of her population on a capitalist basis. In India a revival is possible only on the Gandhian lines of decentralisation of industry and co-ordination of agriculture with industry in the rural areas, is necessary, with the supply of cheap electric power to the village artisan. Sri Vinoba was in agreement with these views.

About politics, I said that Constructive workers had made a mistake in eschewing politics altogether. To this he said that there was a need for some individuals and groups eschewing politics and confining themselves to constructive work, for whatever the character of the Government, it will surely lag behind the progressive ideals of the reformers—be they individuals or groups. I readily accepted this proposition, but added that such individuals and groups must possess three qualifications. The first of these is that they must be active and dynamic and not be satisfied with mere routine. They must also be progressive in their outlook. The second condition is that individuals and groups that set the pace to reform and progress must realise that those who take no active steps to change the present inequitous system help to maintain that system. So far, the Constructive workers have not only remained comparatively silent about the failures of the Congress Governments, but in many cases have supported the Governments. It is just like what the Christian Churches do. They remain “neutral” in politics. The result is that everywhere they help to maintain, by their silence, the inequitous *status quo*. The work of reform then falls upon people who, by their nature, are more interested in power politics than in reform. The third condition necessary for Constructive work-

An Interview with Sri Vinoba

ers is to see that their work does not become something like missionary work undertaken to save their own souls and hence, indifferent to the time factor. Gandhiji worked even the Constructive Programme under a sense of urgency. If a sense of urgency was necessary then, it is much more so now because the forces of disruption and violence today are more active, more organised and more formidable. If Constructive work is carried on as if the whole eternity were before us, then the masses of people who are denied the satisfaction of their primary needs of life and who see their children dying a lingering death for want of proper nutrition, proper clothes and shelter, are likely to seek speedier methods of improving their conditions, even if these methods be violent. They would then listen to every charlatan who can excite their passions.

In all these things Sri Vinoba agreed with me. Then I insisted upon his talking. He related to me the process by which he had been led to think of his present programme of land reform. He said that he had been furiously thinking how in the present state of progressive material and moral deterioration of the country he could revive hope and confidence in Bapu's way. He thought first of refugee-welfare work and came to Delhi. He and his companions for some months tried their hands at it. But as it was closely connected with official machinery they soon found that there was little scope for them to revive the people's hope and confidence in Bapu's principles through that work. And the benefit to the refugees was also next to nil. He and his friends therefore quietly retired from the field. Later, he tried to help the Government in the task of the rehabilitation of Meos. He got some success in this, though the work is being prolonged and some of his workers were still working in the field. It is this double experience that made him think of something which could be

undertaken outside the cramping influence of the Governmental bureaucratic machinery. And he devised his present "Bhoomidan" mission.

When I went to meet Sri Vinoba at Rajghat by appointment on the afternoon of November 13, Sri Tandon and some friends were already there and discussing Sri Vinoba's scheme of land reform—how it will work and about its possibilities. When that discussion was over the talk turned upon the moral effect of the economic and political policies of our Government on the average citizen. Sri Tandon gave his own instance. He said he never used sugar but used to take gur. But recently he had given up that too. One day on asking his servant about the price he paid for gur he was told that half a pound of gur cost four annas. This worked out at Rs. 40/- a maund. Sri Tandon therefore gave up the use of gur because he realised that he was purchasing it in the blackmarket. I said it was impossible for the average man or woman to maintain such high moral standards if social and political circumstances and, at present more especially the latter, were not favourable to their maintenance. The morals of the average citizen change with social circumstances. Only the heroic can transcend these social circumstances. I related what I had seen in one of my Ashrams a few months back. The quantity fixed of rationed cereal was nine ounces per head. But eating with my companions, I saw that they were consuming as much as nine ounces per meal. I asked the secretary how they managed to do it. He smiled and said, "Dada, we are too poor to go to the blackmarket. But there are about a hundred inmates in the Ashram and from a quarter to half of that number are constantly out attending to Khadi work in the villages. We do not return the ration cards and draw rations for all the hundred." I was dumb-founded. This appeared to me worse than blackmarketing. And it was being

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done by those who had worked for the nation for the last thirty years and in the process had silently undergone untold privations. Today, while some of those who began political life with them were enjoying ministerial posts, these workers were still working for the nation on a mere pittance and the value of the allowances they got was ever diminishing. That determined soldiers of the nation like these should be obliged to take recourse to such a course was morally tragic.

I related all this to Sri Vinoba. He admitted that social circumstances have a very powerful bearing on morals. I put it to him that under the circumstances which Sri Tandon and I had described it was only heroes that could stick to even the rudiments of the moral code. If even those people who had sacrificed their all to keep Constructive work going were unable to conform to the ordinary moral standards without thereby impairing their health and efficiency, and consequently, without injuring the patriotic work they were doing, there was something fundamentally wrong in our economic and political life.

I was a little surprised that Sri Vinoba accepted my analysis. I had thought that he was rather indifferent to sociological considerations. He did not attach much importance to organisation. Once he had said in a Sarvodaya meeting that organisation involved violence and he was against it. He believed, instead in the reformation of the individual.

Suddenly he asked me, "What do you want? Do you want the Sarvodaya Samaj to have a political wing of its own?" I said, "Certainly. I had conceived the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party to function as such, if the Sarvodaya Samaj would allow it. I had on several occasions publicly stated, though without due authority, that the K.M.P.P. was the political wing of the Sarvodaya Samaj." I added, however, that

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if the K.M.P.P. could not be approved as such, a fresh political organisation may be set up by the Samaj itself. After all Bapu did consider the political education of the electorate as an item of Constructive work. I asked Vinobaji if he was himself not doing this when he advised people to consider the vote as a public trust and exercise it only in favour of candidates of integrity and efficiency.

Sri Vinoba gave no reply and was silent. He appeared to be deeply thinking.

VINOBA BHAVE

By

BHARATAN KUMARAPPA

In the United States, a question often put to me was, now that Gandhiji had gone, is there any one who can take his place in India? On my return I find to my delight the nearest to an answer. Vinoba Bhave is proving that *ahimsa*, or the principle of love, when applied to human affairs, has still the power which Gandhiji claimed for it.

Unlike Gandhiji, Vinoba who is still in his fifties, is a scholar. Gandhiji's acquaintance with the Indian classics was slight, while Vinoba is well versed in Sanskrit and is soaked in the wisdom of our past. Gandhiji represented the soul of India instinctively. In Vinoba we have Gandhiji's instinct supplemented by almost unbelievable knowledge of the best thought of India through the ages.

The difference in the nature of these two men accounts for the fact that though both have the same convictions and the same moral fervour, Gandhiji has become a world figure while Vinoba is practically unknown. Gandhiji was essentially a public man, interesting himself in activities which brought him into contact with important persons in every walk of life, while Vinoba is by nature a recluse who shrinks from publicity. His interests are scholarly and, when they include people, are confined to those immediately around him. At the same time it is non-violence or love which is his gospel like that of Gandhiji. Let us see how it has expressed itself in Vinoba's life.

His non-violence or love has led him to take interest in all religions. He has studied the scriptures of the important religions of the world, more especially Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and

Christianity. Not content with reading the Koran in translation, he went to the trouble of learning Arabic, just to be able to study the Koran in the original. His knowledge of Bible, especially of the Gospels, is astounding. He can quote chapter and verse, and can interest Jesus' life and teachings with greater understanding than many Christian theologians under whom I have studied. In his study of other religions, his doctrine of love makes him look for their merits rather than for their defects.

His own language is Marathi, but besides it and Sanskrit he has studied Persian, Arabic, English and most of the living languages of India, including Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kanarese. In fact, language study used to be one of his occupations during his 1942-45 imprisonment. Early in the morning, one could hear him reciting aloud in Tamil in his bath some of the poems of the Tamil poet, Bharati. His love recognises no cultural or language barriers. To him the thoughts of all people are equally lovable.

He is an accurate student of history and civilisation, and has very penetrating knowledge of the evolution of ideas and institutions in India and elsewhere, including western countries. His views about the West are generally sympathetic, balanced and objective.

He knows no communal prejudice. In fact, if anything he is more critical of his own community in regard to communal conflicts than of other communities. A few days ago, he said in his tour through Telengana that Pakistan was really the outcome of Hindu aloofness and the attitude of untouchability amongst Hindus to the followers of other religions, rather than due to any teaching of Islam itself. Such self-criticism follows directly from his doctrine of love, which teaches that we must not look for faults in others, but first and foremost seek the fault in ourselves and remove it, for if our conduct is right

and proper, our opponent will cease to be our opponent and become our ally.

Vinoba makes no distinction between caste or outcast, rich or poor. His love makes him want to serve the most despised. So his heart went out to the leper, and he induced one of his workers to dedicate himself completely to the service of lepers.

Like Gandhiji, Vinoba believes in the method of non-violence or love in the political sphere, not as a matter of expediency, but as a creed. Therefore it was that Gandhiji initiated his movements of individual Civil Disobedience in 1940 with Vinoba as the first representative of the people's protest against the war. He described Vinoba then as the ideal satyagrahi or one who came nearest to embodying in his own life and thought the ideal of non-violence or love.

But Vinoba's heart is really not in politics as such, but with the down-trodden masses of our land. Therefore, he is content to bury himself in a few villages. His idea is to make villagers self-dependent, capable of managing their affairs themselves and safeguarding their own interests, for non-violence cannot tolerate control and exploitation of villages by outside agencies. To bring this about, Vinoba believes that villages have to become more or less economically self-sufficient, producing as far as possible all that they require for themselves, especially in the way of the necessities of life. That means paying special attention to agriculture and village industries.

Symbolic of this movement to enable the villager to stand on his own legs and to revise village economic life, is hand-spinning which Gandhiji organized throughout the country. Vinoba took to spinning avidly and brought his scholarly, painstaking and investigating mind to bear on it, and became an expert in the art himself and wrote a text-book on Hand-

spinning as a Basic Craft for teachers of basic education.

In addition to all this, of course, is the need under a philosophy of love for people to live together in peace and unity and to co-operate with each other for each other's good. Vinoba never tires of trying to achieve such unity and co-operation in the villages where he has set up for work.

All these activities are included in the movement for Sarvodaya founded by Gandhiji for the full development of all members of society, none being excluded, rich or poor, capable or incapable, strong or weak. The doctrine of love enjoins that none are to be exterminated or eliminated, but all are to develop side by side for the common good of all. And Vinoba is out to establish such a scheme of things in the villages.

As over against this, Communism preaches class-hatred and violent extermination of the propertied classes. It has established itself in Telengana in Hyderabad State. Vinoba decided to put his non-violent philosophy of Sarvodaya to test in this Communist-ridden area, and went there as a messenger of peace and non-violence. His life was in danger but he refused police protection. He interviewed Communist leaders in jail and outside, and told them that he was as anxious as they to reach the Communist goal of freedom from oppression and exploitation for the common man, but that the only way of achieving this end was through non-violence. He pleaded with them, therefore, as their sympathiser and friend to give up their methods of violence. He toured the villages and soon saw that if Communism had entrenched itself in them it was only because big landlords many of whom owned 10,000 acres of land each, kept the land to themselves and exploited the labour of landless peasants. The only solution, Vinoba was convinced, was to distribute the land to

the cultivators. But how was this to be done? The Communists did it by preaching hatred against the landlord and inciting the peasant to murder, loot, burn and forcibly take possession of the land. This orgy of crime has been costing the State's exchequer Rs. 50 million annually. But what Vinoba armed with nothing but his message of love, did was to appeal to these landlords on the basis of justice and brotherhood to donate their lands to the peasants. He covered nearly 450 miles of rough country on foot, visiting almost 300 villages in about six weeks in the fierce midsummer heat of July 1951 and won the hearts of both rich and poor by his transparent sincerity, selflessness, and faith in man's sense of justice, and love. People thronged around him, and drank in what he had to say. He appealed to the best in them, whether they were landlord, peasant or Communist. Emaciated, dressed in a loin-cloth, living on little else than curds, and trudging on foot from three in the morning, he impressed the people as a man of God, seeking nothing for himself, but undergoing suffering that they may live happily in love and unity. Such redeeming love could not go in vain. Central to his mission was his prayer-meeting, where people saw that his life and teaching were rooted in religion.

That was enough. India's masses, rich and poor, trained through the centuries to respect non-violence, self-renunciation and religion, responded, and it is reported that actually 10,112 acres of land were freely donated by the landlords by the end of his tour. Vinoba has appointed a three-man committee to distribute this land among the cultivators each peasant family to receive roughly one acre of wet land and five acres of dry land. And in regard to land forcibly seized by the Communist he has declared that these should be given back to the landlords, who should voluntarily give them to the peasants. The virtue of this method is that it is twice blessed. It blesses

him who gives and him who receives. Both landlord and peasant are united once more and co-operate with each other for their mutual advantage. It seems too good to be true. And yet it has happened. Truth is stranger than fiction.

Gandhiji applied the law of love with phenomenal success in the political sphere, and India achieved her freedom from foreign rule non-violently. Now Vinoba is applying it in the economic sphere, showing that it can yield phenomenal results there also to free the weak from the strong. He has proved by results that people do respond to an appeal to their reason and conscience. So it is not necessary to resort to violence as Communism does. Indeed the only way to achieve a permanent solution of problems of human conflict is through love and appeal to the highest in man. When this is effectively done, the erstwhile opponent is converted and becomes one's best helper and friend. It is India's answer, based on centuries of aspiration after non-violence, to Russian communism and appears to be full of promise for effectively overcoming the Communist menace all over the world and for turning hate to love, and strife to peace. This is the epoch-making significance of what this humble devotee of non-violence, following the footsteps of Gandhiji, has done in a remote corner of our land.

July 1, 1951

THE WIZARD OF MODERN INDIA

By

SURESH RAMBHAI

On July 3, 1952, Vinoba, the apostle of Bhu-Dana-Yagna or Land-Gift-Mission completed his tour of Uttar Pradesh. But for a brief halt of 11 days at Delhi in November, he has covered village after village, district after district of this State. During his march he secured about two and a half lakhs of acres of land for *Daridra Narayana*, the landless poor.

Curiously enough little is known of the life-history of this unique wizard. Nor does he encourage his biographers. As he himself says, most of his real life has been lived rather within than without and if his biography is to be written he has to write it himself. Like Mahatma Gandhi's "Experiments with Truth", Vinoba's autobiography, whenever it comes to light, will be the enchanting story of the pilgrimage of a soul in constant communion with itself and ceaselessly moving ahead to its cherished objective of the realisation of the Brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of God.

In an immortal verse Tulsidas has compared the character of a saint to that of a cotton fibre since both undergo suffering to contribute to the welfare of others. And just as the black soil of Maharashtra is the richest cotton producing area of the country so also it has been an eternal source from which has sprung up a perennial current of saints who have slaked the parched throat not only of the people of Maharashtra but that of the whole country. Nivrutti, Gyandev, Ramdas, Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram are familiar names who have found an abiding place in India's legend, history and song. The latest member of the self-same procession is the beggar-saint of Paunar, Vinayak Narhari Bhawe, commonly

Vinoba Bhawe

known as Vinoba as Gandhiji gave him the name. Born on August 11, 1895 at Gagoda in the Kolaba district of Bombay Presidency, Vinoba passed a large part of his early life at Baroda, the capital of Baroda State where his father, who passed away in September 1947, was in Government service. Vinoba is the eldest of three brothers, the younger, Sri Balkoba is running the well-known Nature-cure clinic at Uruli Kanchan (Poona) and the youngest, Sri Shivaji, doing constructive work at Dhulia in Khandesh. All the three brothers are '*bal brahmacharies*.' The father, Sri Narhari Sambhurao Bhawe, was a kind and genial soul who never lost his temper and was always truthful and methodical in his ways. Well versed in music, he had a passion for it and has written two books on the subject. Also he was very much interested in dyeing and painting. After retirement he gave some of his time to the Maharashtra branch of the A.I.S.A.

One evening in September 1950 I was at Paunar when, on being reminded by his Secretary that it was his father's third death anniversary, Vinoba referred to him in his post-prayer speech. But it is the mother about whom he speaks the least for she has contributed the most in his make-up. A deeply religious and devoted woman, a Maharashtra Brahmin to the core, with the songs of saints at her lips, she lived a very pious and quite an ideal family life. Being her first-born, he was also her most beloved. It was from her, that Vinya, as she called him, developed his wonderful asceticism and taste for the inner flights of the soul. Whatever she did, she dedicated it to God and never took any thing in the household until she had shared it with her neighbours, the duty of distribution being enjoined upon her Vinya.

In 1907 Vinoba entered the Baroda High School. He was a voracious reader specially keen in Mathematics. He has remained a mathematician all his life, for he does nothing unless he satisfied himself by mak-

ing calculations about it. That is why there is no wastage about him, and he once said that during the whole of his school and college life he wasted not even a minute of his time. He was also quite fond of newspapers, among which he read out *Kesari*, the well-known mouth-piece of Lokmanya Tilak, to his mother every day. He took his Matric Examination in November 1913.

But Vinoba was, it seems, not content with his life and began to think of leaving home for good and give himself up to high work. Two years of Intermediate were of intense inner agitation and suffering. In 1916 Vinoba, an undergraduate, came out of the Baroda College. During the past few years he had read so much that his eye-sight fell down to minus eight. But his memory being strong, sayings after sayings of Maharashtra saints were committed to his heart and he thus enjoyed an intellectual realm all his own. His study helped him immensely later to translate the Sanskrit Gita into Marathi parallel couplets. When I requested him one day to take out some time and translate the Gita into Hindi as well he replied, "Well I can't do that, for I have not read your Hindi saints except Tulsidas, that too only his Ramayana and Vinaya Patrika. As regards Marathi, I had mugged up all I could lay hands upon long-long ago."

From his early years Vinoba has been fond of walking. In Baroda, he with his few friends, used to walk for three to four hours every day and covered some sixteen miles daily. Walking and reading can be said to be his main two occupations. In the Baroda Central Library, his was a familiar figure, with his shirt or kurta hanging on the shoulder. In 1914 at College he started a Vidyarthi Mandal, a sort of study circle.

The year 1916 marks the close of one chapter of Vinoba's life and the commencement of another. Mahatma Gandhi had by now come upon the Indian

scene and started an Ashram at Kochrab in Gujarat. Vinoba joined it. But after some time he took one year study leave. Gandhiji testifies to it that Vinoba returned to the Ashram exactly after one year, to the very day. As he said in a letter to Gandhiji, dated February 10, 1918, during these twelve months he strictly observed Ashram rules and regulations and what he did is simply awful. During this period, he studied the Upanishads, the Gita, the Brahma Sutra and Shankar Bhashya, the Manusmriti, the Patanjala Yoga-Darshan and read through the Nyaya Sutra, Vaisheshik Sutra and Yagnavalkya Smriti and took a vow never to take salt or spices. Besides, he conducted a Gita class of six students, a Gyaneshwari class of four students, an Upanishad class of two, an English class of two and a big Hindi class. Also he covered 400 miles on foot during which he delivered 50 discourses on the Gita etc. Concluding his letter, he asked Gandhiji to accept him as his son. Babu blessed him and wished him a life of service to the country.

In 1918 Vinoba returned to the Sabarmati Ashram. Three years later the late Seth Jamnalal Bajaj came to Gandhiji requesting him the gift of the Ashram's most blossoming flower, Vinoba, for a constructive-work centre at Wardha. Babu agreed and so in 1921, Vinoba came to Wardha to direct and guide the Mahila Ashram. With him came, some of his ablest colleagues who are working right upto now.

Another important event in 1918 in Vinoba's life was the death of his dear and revered mother. At Babu's bidding he had gone there earlier at her service. But he did not participate in her funeral ceremony for he wanted to perform the last rites himself whereas the orthodox custom allowed only the professional priest to do it. And he spent the time at home in reciting the Gita and the Upanishads.

Vinoba's activities from 1921 to 1947 may be regarded as the researches both of a soul-physicist in

The Wizard of Modern India

the laboratory of his self and of a cottage chemist in the laboratory of his Ashram village. The former took him to cosmic spiritual heights, while the latter found expression in the enrichment of the various items of Gandhiji's constructive programme, specially khadi, village industries, Nai Talim and safai. In January 1933 he shifted to Nalwadi, a village about a mile and half from Wardha, where he resolved to support himself by spinning work alone and he spun for hours and hours going deep into the various aspects of khadi craft. Illness overtook him and he was advised to go to hills for rest. He told Bapu that he had chosen his own hill station—a desolated hillock. Like piece of land by the side of the Paunar river, some four miles from Wardha town, where stood a cottage built by Seth Jamnalalji. He gave it the name of Paramdham Ashram which has remained his headquarters ever since.

Again, it was from Wardha that Vinoba took his silent part in the political movements of Gandhiji. He was among the moving spirits of the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha of 1923, his other companions being Seth Jamnalalji, Mahatma Bhagwandeem, and Sri Nilkanth-rai Deshmukh. Next year, in 1924, Bapu sent him to Guruvayoor, Travancore, in the Harijan Temple-Entry Satyagraha. The climax came in October 1940 when he appeared before the world as India's foremost Satyagrahi of the Second World War. In the individual Satyagraha movement he went to jail thrice. As in 1930-31 he was again arrested in 1942 and released three years later.

Returning to Paunar in 1945, he took up a new programme of the scavenger of the village Sargaon. Daily he walked down three to four miles from Paunar to Sargaon and commenced his work regularly at eight o'clock, in heat or cold, sun or rain. Nothing could interrupt him except the death of Bapu when he felt suddenly called upon to undertake higher and more

serious responsibilities. It was at his persuasion that the Sarvodaya Samaj was founded in March 1948. Sometime after he went round the country and took interest in the problem of the resettlement of the Meoes near Delhi. That too, however, did not pacify his inner urges. Again an illness came to his rescue and after severe hard thinking he resolved upon a new venture of physical labour and self-sufficiency at Paramdham in which he himself worked in the fields for eight to ten hours a day. That experiment goes on still with a band of selfless workers devoted to it under his guidance.

While busy in his Samya-Yoga work, Vinoba was urged upon by leading members of Sarvodaya Samaj to attend the third session at Shivarampalli (Hyderabad-Dn). He consented and on 8th March 1951 left Paunar on foot and after covering more than 300 miles reached Shivarampalli on 7th April. On his way back he thought of going through the Telangana area. It was at Pachampalli village in Nalgonda district on 18th April that the idea of Bhu-Dan-Yagna flashed across his mind and with Ram-nam on his lips he launched upon the Bhu-Dan-Yagna, which is now a country-wide movement.

As has been said above, Vinoba translated Gita into Marathi in 1930-31 and gave it the name of Gitai (Gita+Ai Gita the mother), which has sold into thousands and lakhs. His devotion to Gita is matchless and complete. As he says, Gita is his life-element (*Pran-tatwa*) and he lives in the Gita-air. His discourses on Gita, Gita Pravachan, are a wonderful exposition of the Gita. It has been translated into Hindi, Telegu, Kannarese, Malayalam and several other languages of the country.

Like a true devotee of Gita, Vinoba refuses to distinguish between 'Karma' (Action) and 'Gynan' (Knowledge) and 'Bhakti' (devotion) and feels that all three must go together as the shape and weight

and sweetness of a 'laddoo' go. He is, therefore, a master of action and hero of thought and genius of devotion. As a master of action he has been a farmer, scavenger, teli, coolie etc. As a hero of thought he has given some very illustrious gems to the Marathi literature. Besides, Vinoba is a linguist of eminence. Marathi is his mother tongue, so also Gujarati. He has acquired a thorough knowledge of Hindi, Bengali, Oriya and Punjabi. He knows all the four South Indian languages, Tamil, Telugu, Kannara and Malayalam. In Telangana he translated the Shlokas of Gita in Telugu and recently he was studying the classical Tamil Veda. English and French he learnt at school. That he is always young as a student is clear by the fact that he learnt Arabic at the age of 46 and Studied the Holy Quran which he can recite remarkably well. As a genius of devotion he went into trance and tears rolled down his cheeks when he opened the Lakshmi Narayan Temple of Wardha. Thus his whole life is dedicated to God whom he wants to see in the smallest particle as also in the poorest and most down-trodden. The late Sri Mahadev Desai wrote about him:

"Vinoba has something which others have not. His first-rank characteristic is to resolve his decision into action the moment the former is once made. His second characteristic is continuous growth.... Besides Bapu, I found this quality in Vinoba alone."

This is perfectly true. Like a flowing stream Vinoba is always new and fresh. Yet he observes his routine with a sunlike regularity. His refusal to cut short his programme when he met with a serious accident near Meerut in November last, bears this out. And every day he has something new to say in his post prayer speech.

Vinoba, though on foot, is fast moving onward. He is not merely to take an acre of land here or half there. His is to bring about a revolution in the life

Vinoba Bhave

of the society as a whole. The Bhu-Dan-Yajna is an initial Satyagraha to this end. One can well see that time is not far off when he will give a call for Sarv-Dan-Yajna and turn the present unfortunate tide in the economic, social and political life of the country. But what forms the future Satyagraha will take nobody can say. Yet none need be in doubt about the final objective, the attainment of economic and social freedom of the country. The Bhu-Dana-Yajna, therefore, is the first step. And the more selflessly and sincerely and resolutely it is taken, the easier the journey ahead. Vinoba is on the march! Long Live Vinoba!

July 14, 1952

THE GOD WHO GIVES AWAY LAND

By

ROBERT TRUMBULL

Where else but in India, in the atomic age, would polished statesmen pay serious attention to a 90-pound ascetic clad only in loin cloth and sandals, who walks from village to village preaching simply that those who have much should give of their fortunes to those who have none?

Propagating this Gandhian doctrine, Acharya Vinoba Bhave (the name rhymes with ave, as in Ave Maria) became a power in India in a few months. When he came to New Delhi at the invitation of Premier Jawaharlal Nehru the Government built him a hut of bamboo and thatch in a public park at a cost, reportedly, of \$800, and the leading men of India went there to talk to the new sage. The fame of the gray-bearded, 57 year-old Hindu philosopher by then had gone beyond the borders of his own country, and he seems to have become an important permanent fixture in the national life.

Bhave's achievements by merely appealing to the goodness in human nature have been amazing. His eloquent sermons on non-violence as a solution to economic ills are credited with winning thousands of oppressed peasants away from Communism in Telen-gana, where the Communists had a bloody agrarian uprising well under way. Single-handed, he attacked India's grave land problem, which is the source of rural unrest, and swiftly brought about the redistribution of 35,000 acres of land by landlords to their tenants, without coercion or the payment of an anna.

Although Bhave's concrete accomplishment to date hardly dents the land problem, his sermons and prayer meetings in the villages have caused a revolution in thinking wherever he has appeared. The Cen-

tral Ministry of Food and Agriculture has been sufficiently impressed with his methods to offer 10,000,000 acres of Government-owned cultivable wasteland for him to distribute, personally, among the landless. The Acharya—this is a Hindu honorific meaning “preceptor”—replied with a thirty-page memorandum raising practical questions about Government aid, condition of the land, taxes, and so on. This was taken under official study.

Bhave's appeal is essentially religious. A follower of Gandhi since his youth, the Acharya imitates his late mentor's way of life in all particulars, and even bears a physical resemblance to the Mahatma, which is accentuated by his dress. By his appearance, his sermons and his ascetic way of life he strikes a responsive chord in the vein of mysticism that runs in all good Hindus, particularly the unsophisticated villagers who make up the bulk of India's 357,000,000 inhabitants. Gandhi had this quality, but no other Indian leader, not even the idolized Nehru, quite fully possessed it until Bhave emerged.

In any Western country a figure like Vinoba Bhave—half-naked, with unkempt hair and beard, eccentric in habits and preaching unorthodox economics—would invite derision, and such a man might be arrested as a vagabond or confined as a psychopath. Yet, in India his appearance is not too far from normal. “Holy Men” can and do walk stark naked on the streets of Delhi without interesting the law.

By Indian standards of dress and comportment Bhave is hardly more eccentric, or perhaps less so, than many long-haired zealots who occupy soap boxes unmolested in the public squares of American cities.

Persons preaching special causes are common in India. Besides the naked Sadhus already mentioned there are the orthodox Jains, who wear gauze over their mouths so that their expelled breath won't harm microscopic life in the air and who brush the ground

before them with grass whisks while walking in order to avoid unwitting assassination of insects as they set down their feet.

Peculiar costumes or no costumes at all are respected as denoting a man's adherence to his principles, which may be religious or nationalist. Indians have strong pride in their native culture and in their national individuality. Bhave's loin cloth, his scorn of medicine and ordinary diet and his deliberate separation from ordinary canons of thought evoke popular appeal here, for they represent to old-school Hindus a reversion to their ancient Sanskrit culture and a rebellion against the Western civilization that until recently enslaved them. So Bhave's appearance and his extreme asceticism, which isn't feigned, are assets to him in furthering his mission.

The Nehru Government, which, if not mystic itself, at least recognizes this strain in the common people, evidently saw in Bhave a unique personal vehicle for reaching the masses in a way that no official could hope to do. Skeptics in the more worldly circles of the capital wonder if the Government's discovery of Bhave had anything to do with the national election campaign going on at this time. Bhave is non-political and has expressed himself against campaigning for votes beyond factual presentation of party policies, but one would nevertheless expect that his emergence under the Nehru Administration's aegis would have some favourable influence on the peasantry's doubtful regard for the ruling party.

Bhave became a mystic in his teens. Like countless Hindu devotees before him, he emulated the greatest Indian mystic of all, Gautama the Buddha, and ran away from his home in Baroda State to seek enlightenment in the holy city of Benares, on the banks of the sacred Mother Ganges. There he studied Hindu Philosophy, but found the ancient books were not enough. Seeking a new "way", he journeyed to

Vinoba Bhave

Gandhi's ashram, or religious retreat, at Sabarmati, near Ahmedabad. He became a favourite of the Mahatma. When a rich patron offered to finance a new ashram, Gandhi sent Bhave to establish one at Sewagram, in Central India, in 1921. This became Bhave's home for the rest of his life, and later Gandhi himself made his headquarters there.

Bhave remained one of the dedicated company that surrounded the Mahatma until the end. Gandhi chose him for the honor of being the first man to court arrest in the passive resistance campaign of 1939 against entry of India into World War II before the Government had ascertained the wishes of the Indian people. In his career with Gandhi, Bhave was jailed by the British six times. On Gandhi's death, Bhave, by now an Acharya to his followers, came out of ashram life to continue propagation of his master's teachings, but after brief prominence he returned to obscurity until this year.

Bhave's sensational rise to country-wide influence and international renown grew out of his brooding on the Communist bloodshed in Telengana, a large, roughly defined area of Hyderabad State where 8,000,000 peasants endure some of the worst land tyranny in the world. Even slavery exists today in Telengana. Two years ago the Communists aroused the oppressed tillers and a sanguinary reign of terror began, with wholesale murder of landlords and forcible confiscation of their holdings. Until a worried Government struck back with augmented soldiery and police, there were districts in Telengana that were entirely under Communist rule, red pockets in free India.

With a few followers, the Acharya set out for Telengana on foot last April. He disregarded warnings of police, who themselves hardly dared set foot where the Acharya prepared to go with no armament but his philosophy. He likewise spurned offers of

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protection against the fierce tigers, leopards and wild boars that menace the traveller on jungle paths. Bhave made it clear that his own life was a matter of no concern to him whatsoever, and this was his protection against the Communist guerillas, who were more murderous than the jungle beasts.

In the next few months, the slender little social evangelist was to walk 1,800 miles through five states in south, central and north India, gathering countless followers for *ahimsa* (non-violence) and Bhoomidan yajna (land gift sacrifice). Bhoomidan yajna is the phrase that has captured the nation. When word passed through the countryside that Acharya Vinoba Bhave was to appear at a certain village, thousands came afoot and by bullock cart from miles around to hear him. He became known in Telengana as "the god who gives away land."

The mystic's daily travels were marked by continuous festival. In the villages and along the roads where he was to pass, the poorest huts were festooned with palms and mango leaves—symbol of good fortune. The villagers many of them gaunt and scantily clad in rags, flocked around the Acharya to touch his feet—a mark of respect to holy men in India—and to deck him with garlands of flowers.

His departure from a village at dawn was a noisy event: fortunately, most Indians are very early risers (they retire early, too, for electric lighting is rare in the villages, and kerosene is expensive and rationed). As the Acharya prepared to resume his endless hiking tour, villagers would line up behind him, set up a great clamour of drums, cymbals and bugles, and chant the various names of the deities, especially of Rama and his wife, Sita, Gandhi's favourites. Singing Hindu hymns, they would follow their new idol for a mile, at which time Bhave would bid them goodbye with the appealing Indian gesture of folded hands raised to the breast.

The Acharya's day, like Gandhi's begins at about 3 o'clock in the morning. Rising from his humble charpoy, or woven cot, he leads his retinue in an hour and a half of prayer and meditation. They start the day's walk at about 5. Bhave, despite his age and frailty, is a prodigious walker, averaging five miles an hour at a steady pace that never slackens. As he moves through the morning on the dusty roads, disciples, local officials and interviewers may talk to him.

By noon he will have reached the village of his destination. Only then do the Acharya and his entourage have their austere breakfast—vegetarian, of course, and with no tea or coffee. Bhave takes only butter-milk and gur, or unrefined sugar. He suffers from a duodenal ulcer, but scorns medical treatment and keeps the ailment under control with this diet.

Then there is rest for a couple of hours, followed by a half-hour of spinning khaddar, homespun cotton, thus carrying on the dramatization of Gandhi's formula for promoting home industry. At 3 o'clock, Bhave holds a unique informal court, at which grievances are brought to him and his advice is sought. In their fervor, villagers accept the Acharya's decisions as a command. For many of them accustomed to fascistic police and landlord oppression and the vagaries of princely rule, the Acharya's courts have been their first experience with real justice.

In these sessions, which, of course, have no law behind them but the law of God, the Acharya has patched up family feuds of generations past, forced the settlement of domestic quarrels, persuaded grasping employers to pay back wages owing to needy workers, and has undone abuses of the arrogant local police. Invariably, the penitent offender becomes a Bhave follower. Comes 5 o'clock and the Acharya, in Gandhian tradition, leads his daily prayer meeting. Devotions begin with readings from the sacred scriptures of all the major religions of India—Islam,

Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism, and, of course, the beloved Bhagavad Gita.

Bhave preaches his nightly sermon in Gandhi's fashion, rambling, from topic to topic, answering letters, dealing with whatever problems of the day happen to come to his mind. He dwells most frequently and successfully on voluntary land redistribution. His most effective plea is directed to the sense of family solidarity that is the important governing factor in orthodox Hindu life. Customarily, property is divided among the male heirs. The Acharya pleads with the landlords, "Regard me as your additional son, and give me my share for the poor," and many of them do.

Deeds are handed over on the spot, and distribution is made to deserving landless tillers, many of them untouchables, by a board of five trustees, including two Untouchables. The Acharya believes every family should have five acres, on the average; the amount varies according to needs and condition of the soil. He will accept any amount, and has received gifts of hundreds of acres and one, from a poor proprietor, of a single gunta, or one-fortieth of an acre.

Bhave brushes aside the question of fragmentation, or division of land into uneconomic holdings, which is one of the inherited agrarian problems in India. This has brought him considerable criticism from sponsors of the zamindari (landed estate) abolition movement, who have laws on the statute books of several states of orderly redistribution of land, with compensation to the owners over a period of years from Government collection of rent until the debts are paid.

Bhave has announced a goal of 50,000,000 acres—one-sixth of the total cultivable area of all India—in his *bhoomi dan yajna* crusade. Impressive as his work has been, he would hardly reach his goal at the

present rate of progress. But public leaders, including Nehru, have been struck by the Acharya's success in getting his people to think along a gentle line, as Gandhi did.

Premier Nehru, impressed with Bhave's approach in Telengana, invited him to come to New Delhi and impart his ideas to the National Planning Commission a high-powered body of which Nehru is the chairman. Bhave, then 785 miles away, undertook to walk to the capital. Some miles out he was met by hundreds of Delhi enthusiasts who travelled to a rendezvous in cars to walk the remaining distance with the emaciated leader, who was already a national figure.

The Acharya could have lived where he liked; Gandhi in his last couple of years inhabited an apartment in the mansion of G. D. Birla, one of India's richest industrialists, and was assassinated while walking to his evening prayer meeting in the Birla House gardens. Bhave elected to settle in Rajghat, the memorial park surrounding India's most revered national monument a plain concrete platform on the spot where Gandhi's body was cremated near the banks of sacred river Jumna. Next to Gandhi's *samadhi*, or shrine, the Government at Bhave's direction erected a neat, three-room hut of bamboo with a roof of grass thatch, and built a surfaced motor road directly to it from the highway a few hundred yards away.

This red-earth driveway was travelled by the biggest men in India in the next few days. The visiting notables, President Rajendra Prasad and Premier Nehru among them, and Oxford and Cambridge graduates and skilled administrators holding British knighthoods (no longer recognized officially here, but still exploited by some), shucked their shoes as they approached the sage, and sat before him cross-legged, like school boys.

The surroundings were strikingly reminiscent of Gandhi's camps. While the master lay on a charpoy, pulling a wisp of cloth about his bare shoulders when the wind blew, dedicated females in white drifted in and out of sight, wraith-like, about household tasks. Earnest male secretaries sat near by with note-books, taking down the sage's every word. Serious young girls, wearing black-rimmed spectacles, the same kind that were always near Gandhi, hovered about Bhawe.

The Acharya's discussions with the Planning Commission brought out no great measure of agreement, but this high-level body had numerous sessions with the sage, each of several hours' duration. President Rajendraprasad visited Bhawe on the mystic's first day in Delhi. Before he left the President pledged a gift of acreage—the amount was not made public—from his own private estate in Bihar. Nehru came several times, staying more than an hour on each occasion, despite the preoccupations of his office and the current election campaign.

After eleven busy days in New Delhi, Bhawe resumed his mission, trekking on into the State of Uttar Pradesh, a landlord-ridden territory, to continue his crusade to defeat Communism by free gifts of the "haves" to the "have-nots". Reports have come back to the capital that the gentle ascetic has been adding to bhoomidan yagna at the rate of 300 acres a day, and the Indian newspapers continue to print laudatory editorials and feature articles on the remarkable Acharya. He is, no doubt, a phenomenon that could happen only in India, and it is undeniable that here, in the peculiar setting suited to his talents, he has done much good.

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A POWERFUL SOUL

By

BIRENDRANATH GUHA

"A powerful soul lives in a weak body. As the soul advances in strength, the body languishes," Gandhi wrote, in *Navajivan*, June 5, 1924. If it is acceptable, Vinayak Narhari Bhavé may very well possess a powerful soul. And he does. Vinoba stands five foot six and weighs just seven stones. He works hard. He walks a lot, not less than twelve to thirteen miles in the average. His day begins at 3 A.M. and usually ends at 9 P.M. He and his associates pray as they work, or, now, as they walk.

As the writer first saw him he had the feeling that had not there been a Gandhi to draw him to the service of man as service of God, he might well have been one of the very highest order of recluses of whom India has ever had a succession. But very soon he came to revise his estimate. For, like all the great souls of India who had something new to give, Vinoba also has a commentary of his own on the *Gita*. And it emphasizes immaculate service as the road to unity with the Maker. Vinoba has a complete philosophy of life. And that philosophy, if not the whole, quite a large slice of it must be akin to Gandhi's. For ascribing to Gandhi all that he is doing, and the great change that has come in his manners, he says, "It is Bapu's blessings that have wrought this miracle. I believe, the work I am doing would please his soul wherever it might be." And again, "This day, I feel the presence of Bapu, as I feel the presence of God."

Who will now say which of the two estimates is the correct one! Vinoba only can.

"Makest me thy slave, effacest my ego, erasest my name," so prays Vinoba just as the master did, "I want to be his willing slave." Vinoba wants to reduce himself to a zero.

The dumb millions are his masters as they were to Gandhi. Gandhi would not go to the Himalayas to see God. So too, Vinoba would not go to sacred places to seek his God. "....But for me the place where you all live is the sacred place. To me your bodies are not just compounds of the five elements. I look upon you as my God. Long journeys tire out this frail body. But when I get an opportunity to serve you my fatigue vanishes."

Yet Vinoba is not an echo. It is fortunate he is not. For it is not given to an echo to walk a new way, to give a thing a new shape such as the times demand, to fulfil a historical necessity. Vinoba has to fulfil a historical necessity. Vinoba is original. Vinoba is a revolutionary. Gandhi gone, India needed such a one as he. India has half the Swaraj. The other half remains to be constructed. If it is to be as it was envisaged by Gandhi and as alone can lead to the true emancipation of the masses, it needs a revolutionary. Vinoba's *Bhoo-dan Yajna* is the first step to the realization of that economic independence—the *Sarvodaya*.

One's work is one's life. Vinoba's work is just now before the public. And it is an ample page. Yet men look backward, as they look forward to size up a thing. It is in them.

Born in 1894, Vinoba will complete his fifty-seventh year on September 11. He was the eldest of five children, four sons and a daughter born to Narahari Bhave and Rukmini Devi. The Bhaves of Gagoda, Tahsil Pen, District Kolaba in Maharashtra were fairly well-to-do Chitpavan Brahmans. The youngest of the four brothers died young. Bal-

krishna Vikoji Bhave the second brother is in charge of the Nature Cure Centre, started by Gandhi at Uruli-Kanchan. The third brother Shivaji, a great Sanskrit scholar, lives at Dhulia unattached to any Ashram or institution. He takes orders from the eldest brother and is engaged in language reform work. Under instructions of Vinoba he has given shape to *Loka Nagari lipi* which avoids use of compounds.

Rukmini must have been a wise lady, a sensible mother. Vinoba got a lot from her. He often fondly refers to her in his writings. In the obituary notice in *Sarvodaya* of Raman Maharshi the following occurs: "One day while reading *Bhakta-Vijaya* I remarked, 'Mother, such saints were there only in ancient times.' 'Mother said,' Vinoba continues, 'they are there even today. Only we do not know them. Without such as these the world cannot go.'" Gita-pravachana contains many a like reference to his mother. Vinoba writes:

"Like so many, I also once said to mother, 'Here is a beggar strong and plump, come to beg. To give alms to such a one is to encourage indolence and lassitude.' And I cited in support the *Deshe kale cha patre cha* sloka from the Gita. Mother said, 'The beggar that is come is God Himself. Now distinguish the deserving from the undeserving. Would you rate God as undeserving? Who are you and who am I to distinguish one from the other. I do not see there is much to consider. For me he is God.'" And then Vinoba observes, "I have not to this day found a fitting reply to what mother said in meeting my objection."

Instances such as these could be multiplied. But that is unnecessary. She died rather young in 1918, a victim to the influenza scourge.

In childhood Vinoba was most unruly. He had possibly in him an extra dose of surplus energy that

led him to monkeyish tricks which often invited a fastidious father's birch. But morally Vinayak was all right, all high.

Father Narahari secured a diploma in dyeing from the Maharaja Gaekwad's Kala Bhavan. He belonged to the first batch of students. He served for some time in the dyeing department of the Buckingham Mills. British India khaki was a contribution of Kala Bhavan. In order to give his children proper education Narhari left the Buckingham Mills job and shifted to Baroda as a head-clerk in State Government service. Narahari was a man of modern outlook and had a bias for industrial education.

Up to sixth standard Vinayak always stood first. He then lost interest in routine studies, and passed his examinations somehow. Nevertheless his store of knowledge kept increasing in volume. He was selective in his studies, things enduring appealing rather than things transient. A great Sanskrit scholar, he has not read *Sakuntala*. Mathematics and philosophy were his favourite subjects. Of mathematics only recently (*Sarvodaya*, March 1952) he wrote, "Next to God if I love anything best it is mathematics." And mathematical precision marks all his actions as *anasakta* actions enjoined by the Gita should be. A marvellous memory aided by selective studies laid the foundation of his profound scholarship. Vinoba had French for his second language. His father had a mind to send him to Europe.

In those days there was no spiritual or ascetic trend in him. Politics drew him. And politics then meant getting rid of the British. It was partition days then. Chiplunker and Tilak were his heroes. Young Vinayak and friends started a Vidyarthi Mandal which might any day become a bomb-throwers' association.

Vinoba was to appear in I.A. examination in 1916. Ostensibly he left for Bombay for the purpose,

but went to Calcutta and thence to Banaras, where he saw Gandhi first. He joined Mahatma's Ashram.

Gandhi wrote about him thus:

"...He is a Sanskrit scholar. He joined the Ashram almost at its inception. He was among the first members. In order to better qualify himself he took one year's leave to prosecute further studies in Sanskrit. And practically at the same hour at which he had left the Ashram a year before he walked into it without notice. I had forgotten that he was to arrive that day. He has taken part in every menial activity of the Ashram from scavenging to cooking. Though he has a marvellous memory and is a student by nature, he has devoted the largest part of his time to spinning in which he has specialized as very few have...Being a born teacher he has been of the utmost assistance to Asha Devi in her development of the scheme of education through handicrafts.

"...He is responsible for producing a young man who has dedicated himself to the service of lepers."

The above, Gandhi wrote introducing Vinoba to the public as the first individual Satyagrahi.

"In 1917, when Mr. Andrews was at the Ashram," wrote Mahadev Desai in *Harijan*, October 20, 1940, "I remember Gandhiji describing to him Vinoba in these terms: 'He is one of the few pearls in the Ashram. They do not come, like others, to be blessed by the Ashram, but to bless it, not to receive, but to give.'"

Did he not get anything in return from the Ashram? Let Mahadev say. In *Young India* of 1923 he wrote:

"...Though Gandhiji said that he had gone to the Ashram to give and not to receive, this is what Vinoba has said in a talk: 'Only I can know what I

have got in the Ashram. It was an early ambition of mine to distinguish myself by a violent deed in the service of the country. But Bapu cured me of that ambition. It is he who extinguished the volcano of anger and other passions in me. I have been progressing every day of my life in the Ashram. Every year I have been making one of the *Mahabratas* my own'."

Vinoba was not keeping well in the Ashram. He got one year's leave. He went to Wai, a health resort in Satara District. Wai is a sacred place, a beauty-spot on the Krishna river, and at the foot of the Mahabaleshwar hills. There the Bhaves of Gagoda have a temple dedicated to Shankara. At the time Narayan Shastri Marhatta, a great Sanskrit scholar, had his Prajna Pathshala there. During his stay at Wai, Vinoba took lessons from the Shastri not as a regular but a casual student.

Marathi is his mother language. Besides Sanskrit and Pali, Vinoba knows English, French, Urdu, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and possibly Kanarese and Oriya. At Sevapuri he opened his talk with Sarvodaya Sevak from Bengal with a Bengali sentence: "I do follow Bengali, but can't speak it." He is learning Bengali. He learns the languages of the people of India, because he wants to appeal straight to their heart, which you never can, unless you do speak to them in their own. And this also induced him to learn Arabic, the language of the Koran, the sacred book of Muslims, our neighbours. And he has a peculiar language sense. He will detect in your speech flaws of language, even it be that his acquaintance with your language is of the slightest. His language is simple and direct. The words he chooses are appropriate and are such as any one would understand. There is no verbiage in him. He has a rare economy in the use of words. The following excerpt from him will give an idea of the literary skill he prizes:

"Choose every word carefully. For, if the words you choose are not appropriate, your expression instead of being substantial may be just airy. Some words carry inadequate sense, some more than the adequate, and some again have contrary connotations. One must avoid all these three defects and express a thing exactly as it takes shape in the mind."

Gandhi initiated the people into truth and non-violence, and through them (Satyagraha) gave India political freedom. It has been left to Vinoba to initiate the people into *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *asteya* (non-stealing) and through them (Sarvodaya) to construct the other half of India's freedom—economic independence.

"Shri Vinoba saw that the root of the malady of the present world lay in its faith in money. It was therefore necessary to depose Money, the symbol of possession (and of power, if we are permitted to add) from its sovereignty over life. After deep reflection accompanied with fast, Shri Vinoba made a resolve not to accept money gifts. And there never was with him a question of earning money.

Labour and money are the two forces in the world. In order to escape from labour one has to lay by money. As long as money occupies the place of pride, labour cannot attain dignity, however much it may improve in its quality and volume. Vinoba has deposed money and raised the dignity of labour. Only after bringing about this transformation in his own person has Vinoba earned for himself the right to preach non-possession, i.e. curtailing one's possessions of wealth. And owners of land have supplied the proof that the Indian nation has not forgotten its ancient tradition of being influenced by the higher law—the law of spirit."—Kaka Kalelker.

At Paramdham Pavnar, Vinoba's Ashram, they produce by body-labour primary necessities of life.

They forgo for the time being the use of any such item they need but have not produced. They do not go to market for it. Vinoba defines this effort to depose money, the realization of this ideal as *Samya-yoga*. And his *Bhoo-dan yajna* is an extension of this ideal to society, for without returning lands to the tillers of the soil, there is no doing away with the sway of wealth. Vinoba attributes his achievements in Telengana and Uttar Pradesh to this experiment of his at Paramdham Pavnar. He says also:

"But for that experiment, I might not have the confidence which marked all my actions; but for that I might not have shed my timidity and my shyness might have persisted. Then too, the labour I put on good earth acknowledging the cultivator as my *guru*, has given me a humility I never have had."

Vinoba was not what he is today. According to Tukoji Maharaj, the celebrated Bhajan-singer from Maharashtra, Vinoba was not accessible. He says:

"God is for the good of all. What was Bapu if he was not God? Today revered Vinoba has become god. Vinoba was not what he is today. His was a secluded life. He did not meet any one, nor did he talk to anybody. Had Bapu been with us today you would not have found Vinoba going from village to village. He talked at you, never talked to you. He has now come to realize that seclusion, cold reserve does not pay. He now addresses people as brother, as cousin. To some he says he is his brother, to some other he says he is his son. Who will say this Vinoba is that Vinoba? Father gone, the son has now to shoulder the burden. Now Vinoba to us is what Bapu was to us then. After Gandhi's death he has become as loving as he."

With all his humility—he ends his speeches and letters with *Vinoba ke pranam* (Vinoba's salutation)—a little ruggedness seems still to persist in him,

which time and his daily increasing contact with people will round off. Or it may be, he retains something of the old reserve that is mistaken by casual visitors as ruggedness. The character of that reserve is revealed from the following, written by Mahadev Desai in *Young India* of 1917.

"You may stay days and days with him without knowing him and even when you know him you only begin to know him. You meet with a reserve which you cannot easily break. He does not talk much, rarely does he say anything about himself. And yet if you could get at the bottom of his profound depths you are sure to exclaim, "Nowhere have I struck such treasures."

The Gita has been and is his guide. He turns to it at every corner for direction and he gets it. The Gita sustains him, gives him energy, gives him drive. In his own words:

"I have no words to explain the place the Gita occupies in my life. It has done me infinite good." And again,

"In all my actions the Gita has been my guide, as it is today. It has always given me peace of mind, energy and wisdom. Whenever I needed an incentive or the drive to do a thing, it came from the Gita."

And what, according to Vinoba, the Gita teaches if that can at all be given in so few words? To him the Gita does not emphasize action alone, or devotion alone, or realization alone. Neither would he accept the opposite view which regards it as an amalgam of the three. A little of all the three has also no appeal for him. That it is a gradual progress from action to devotion and from devotion to realization is neither acceptable to him. Nor does he like the view that seeks to reconcile the three. "I would rather say,"

he writes in his commentary, "what is action is devotion and what is devotion is realization."

Vinoba's *Gitai* is a good seller. Of it Mahadevbhai wrote: "He has produced a Marathi translation of the Gita in parallel verse which reproduces the haunting music of the original in an amazing degree and hundred thousand copies of it have been sold in Maharashtra." His *Gita-pravachan* in Hindi, a translation from the original in Marathi, has gone through five editions, number of copies running to sixty-six thousand.

Now a brief reference to his work that is just now before the public and that has given him publicity.

Establishment of equality, to bring about Sarvodaya (the greatest good of *all*, and not the greatest good of the greatest number) is the object of *Bhoodan yajna* which Vinoba has called his five-year plan. Vinoba says:

"Now that political freedom has been attained, we have to work for the establishment of equality. I have called that Sarvodaya. You may, if you like, call that Samyayoga or Sarvodaya. It is for the establishment of this Sarvodaya that I have been going from village to village.

"I call this my five-year plan. If all of you take up this work for the next five years and during that time succeed in transferring five crore acres of land, then a great non-violent revolution has taken place in India."

It is a historical necessity.

"What I am doing is not against the trend of history. You have to recognize that what has not happened before may happen. Russian revolution had had no precedent, yet it came. So too this may come

about. Whatever that may be, what I am doing is not against history, but is a historical necessity."

Vinoba does not beg, he initiates.

"I demand land," Vinoba says, "as of right on behalf of the poor. I do not beg it of you. I say I am here to initiate you into the right conduct."

For, "if the thirsty do not get clean water to drink, they quench their thirst with foul water."

His is the third way, the non-violent one.

"A great revolution is taking shape in India. I see it before me. Russia passed through a kind of revolution. America is passing through a second kind. I have observed them both. Either of them is foreign to the culture and genius of India."

India's is the third way, with its embryo in the *Bhoo-dan yajna*. Vinoba is confident of success. And his confidence—confidence of a man who has reduced himself to a zero, speaks:

"Those who do not give me land today, will give tomorrow. They cannot but give. There is none who may refuse me."

Vinoba is resolute. It is always "do or die" with him. Appealing to all for support he says:

"I invite you all to work for this revolution. I seek to revolutionize thought, to revolutionize the means. The sages say, youths delight in new creation, new mission. Here is a mission for them, a new world to create."

Vinoba is beginning to draw the masses as Gandhi did. He is forging a tremendous sanction. It is in us to make it compelling. When it is, the people straying away from Gandhian way, shall walk back. Or there is struggle. And struggle will only add to Vinoba's stature.

September 1952.

A GENTLE REVOLUTIONARY

By

SHYAM SUNDER

There are indeed very few occasions when one sees some super-natural being managing the affairs of man and the origin of the Land Gifts Mission of Acharya Vinoba Bhave bears ample testimony to this fact. In the words of Acharya Bhave himself, during his tour of Telengana the idea originated thus! "At one place at the request of local Harijans to get some land for them, I asked the village people to donate sufficient land for them. The people acceded to my request and I received the first bhoodan that day. This was on 18th April 1951. This is how the idea of Bhoomidan Yajna came to me.....". It is an experiment in the voluntary re-distribution of land and Vinoba's success has to a measure been due to his ability to talk to the peasants in their own language. Here was a missionary than whom, they felt, there is no other sincere and zealous man who has come forward to help them solve the complex problem of their very survival. The aim of his mission is to ask the owners of land to donate a part for re-distribution to others. He had originally fixed a target of 500 lakh acres during a period of five years but subsequently it was revised at Sevapari this year to 25 lakh acres within the next two years which is about 1 percent of the net area actually sown. Donations have so far amounted to some 3½ lakh acres. Though the achievement is very limited, it is the emphasis and the spirit of his mission that has won for him the admiration and respect of not only his countrymen but foreigners too.

In order to assess the importance of the Bhoodan Yajna it is essential to look back into the past. A

self-sufficient village granting employment to every man and woman was the basis of an Indian society until very recent times. The village artisans produced a few things with the use of very simple machinery. Demands were very few and spiritualism rather than materialism was the basis of economy. Money was not in much use and barter was the rule. With the invasion and subsequent conquest by the British the country was opened to the influence of the West which was rapidly being mechanised. Cheap machine made goods and railways upset the fine balance of the village economy. Old crafts disappeared and the new industries could not be set up at a speed which was fast enough to absorb the old artisan class or other surplus man power. While rents remained fairly rigid through time, the productivity of land went on declining with the use of old tools and implements assisted by malnutrition of the land. With the uneconomic nature of agriculture, the expenses of the agriculturists did not go down. Old customs particularly those requiring comparatively large expenses on certain social occasions made the plight of the peasantry a very pitiable one. Laws of succession and inheritance accentuated the position and the poor cultivator came to depend upon the mercy of the money lender for all practical purposes. To add to all this, the population of India went on increasing at a very fast pace and now stands at 36 crores. All this has had two important direct results; there has been an increasing fragmentation of holdings and the class of the tenant cultivators has also been swelling. -

The extent of fragmentations of holdings is shown in the table on the next page.

The ensuing table shows that the percentage of families with small holdings is very high indeed and that a high percentage of holdings is uneconomic.

A Gentle Revolutionary

Percentage of families with different sizes of land holdings.

(In acres)

Province	Less than 2	2-5	5-10	10 and above
Assam	38.9	27.4	21.1	12.6
(a) Bombay (Deccan)	19.8	16.7	18.3	44.7
West Bengal	34.7	28.7	20.0	16.6
Madhya Pradesh	49.0	..	21.0	30.0
Orissa	50.0	27.0	13.0	10.0
Madras	51.0	31.0	7.0	11.0
(a) Uttar Pradesh	55.8	25.4	12.8	6.0

(a) % cultivators instead of % of families.

As regards the number of agricultural labourers, it has increased from 75 lakhs in 1882 to 3.3 crores in 1931. According to the 1951 census, out of the total population of 36 crores of the Indian Union, 24.9 crores was agricultural. The number of cultivating labourers and their dependents was 4.5 crores. Besides this, there were another 3.1 crores of cultivators of land wholly or mainly unowned and their dependents. It has been estimated by competent observers that agriculture can spare about 30% of the people employed in it without affecting the efficiency of production.

These facts and figures show that the position of India on the agricultural plain is quite unsatisfactory. Though efforts are now being made to industrialise the country at a much faster pace than hitherto, she is dependent upon foreign countries for some of the essentials of life including food.

Trained in the Gandhian way of thinking, this hero of the Individual Satyagraha Movement is pledged to put Mahatma's ideas into practice. There are generally two ways to meet a situation described above. Abolition of Zamindari with compensation has been suggested as one of the solutions. It is estimated that Rs. 450-500 crores will be required to abolish Zamindari in the whole of the country. This figure is so staggeringly large that some people have been led to think of taking over Zamindaris without compensation. Acharya Vinoba Bhave has shown a third way and this has fittingly been christened by him as the '*Bhumi-dan Yajna*' or Land-Gifts Mission. His method consists of going from village to village, explaining the anxiously awaiting people the purpose of his mission and then making request for the gifts of land. At every village, he introduces his mission in an original manner. He makes it perfectly clear to the donor that land gift on his part does not imply benevolence; he considers his demand a rightful share on behalf of the poor. He pleads with the owners of land to change with times and to see the writing on the wall. After getting the land, one man goes round the village to find out the landless ones and land is thereafter distributed to each one of them. Those who were peniless before, became the owners of land overnight. In Uttar Pradesh, in the early stages of his tour, he practised a novel method. In conformity with Hindu traditions Vinoba at first distributed '*prasad*' to the audience and thereafter asked for land gifts as though they were offerings to '*Arati*'. But Arati of whom? Of Daridranarayan. Thus there is taking place a non-violent revolution which may well solve many of the ills from which Indian agriculture suffers.

Some of the donated plots are as small as .05 acres and most of the donated lands have not exceeded an area of 10 acres. In such a case, an attempt is made to find a wealthy man who will take such

A Gentle Revolutionary

plots, and, in exchange give a consolidated piece which may be distributed among the landless. In case of those donated lands which are under cultivation the task of distribution is fairly easy. The distribution of those lands which are cultivable but are not being cultivated, is slightly delayed as the donated land has to be reclaimed. In the early stages of Bhoodan Yajna, land was being re-distributed to political sufferers also but subsequently at the suggestion of Shri Rajagopalachari it was stopped as it was not in keeping with the spirit of the Yajna. Harijans will have a special position because in some cases they do not have the right of even owning the land. Acharya Bhave, therefore, decided to distribute to Harijans at least one third of the land gifts received by him.

The improvement that occurred in the situation in Telengana has to a great extent been due to the diligence of Acharya. To fulfil the objects of the gift, Vinoba Bhave appointed a small committee in Hyderabad. The method of distribution of land as prescribed by him is that ordinarily the basis of distribution shall be either one acre of wet land per family, or one acre of dry land per individual but it is within the competence of the committee to depart from this general rule, depending upon the exigencies of the situation. The pattern set by Hyderabad serves as a model for the rest of the country to follow.

In this connection it would be interesting to observe that there was some controversy between Acharya Bhave and the Planning Commission. To Vinoba no plan can be worth its name unless it provides sufficient food and employment to the peoples; they are indeed the basic functions of Government. He is not satisfied with the Government's policy of continued food imports. In order to maintain a high level of employment he advocates self-sufficient villages which would convert their raw produce into

finished goods locally in the villages. The members of the Planning Commission consider these ideas largely Utopian. Self-sufficiency in food is by and large difficult to attain and in any case there is no sanctity about it. There are big industrialised countries of the West which import their food requirements without affecting them adversely except in times of war. As regards industry, it does not find any place of pride in the plans of the Commission. Though they appreciate the importance of proper location of industry, they do not believe in the efficacy of cottage and small scale industries to the extent that Acharya Vinoba does. Here there is a fundamental difference of approach, to Vinoba it is the moral aspect of working in cottage and healthy surroundings that matters most, to the Planning Commission large scale industries producing cheaper goods are more important. It would be pertinent to record here that in Japan which competed so successfully with highly industrialised countries of the West, the basis of economy are the small and cottage industries. Experts like Colin Clerk are of the opinion that the salvation of countries like India with large population lies in small and cottage industries rather than large units producing on a mass scale. It has also been alleged that fragmentation of holdings will be accentuated by the Bhoodan Yajna. According to Prof. C. N. Vakil "One of the immediate needs of the country is to hasten the pace of land re-distribution. Whatever be the merits of large scale ownership of wealth in a non-agricultural form of activity, so long as agriculture continues to be a way of life, rural opinion will never tolerate any piece of land reform which does not think in terms of redistribution of land and the splitting of large-sized holdings". Acharya Bhаве stresses the importance of co-operative measures. Cultivators

can combine and own the instruments of production jointly. It is an underlying idea of the Yajna to facilitate the enactment of a legislation to fix maximum individual holdings. Acharya considers that it will be necessary to grant loans and other facilities for the development of lands re-distributed under the aegis of his mission. He has started the Sampatti Dan to help purchase land for re-distribution. Acharya has accepted gifts not from the rich but also from the poor, for after all there are others who have no land at all. Besides, it is the spirit of the gift which is of more significance. He asks people to consider him as one of family where in case of partition, the property is divided among all. It will be interesting to recall some anecdotes. An aged woman who had neither seen Vinoba nor heard of him, gave away all her property, 61 acres and a house in which she lived. In a letter she wrote that as she had no son, she accepted Vinoba as her son and signed the gift deed in his favour. There is another instance of a blind man, Shri Ramcharan Chaudhri of Chandahpur (U.P.). He went to Vinoba at the dead of night when the latter was asleep. He offered all the twelve bighas owned by him because it would be redistributed among the poor. Among the rich donors may be mentioned the names of the Nizam who has given 3654 acres and the R.S.S. leader of Jaunpur, Shri Yadavendraji who has gifted 2,000 acres.

Though the odds have been heavy, the Bhoodan-Yajna has made an impressive progress. The average in Telengana was 200 acres per day; from Wardha to Delhi it was 250, while from Delhi to Sitapur (U.P.) it was 315. The average per donor previously was 12 acres, now it stands at 16. These facts show definite progress but it has not come upto the expectations of Acharya. The table below gives the break up of targets for the next two years and achievements

of Bhodan Yajna upto July 1952 unless otherwise stated:—

	Target	Donations (In acres)
Assam	25,000	
Andhra	100,000	
Uttar Pradesh	500,000	304,370 (6-9-52)
Orissa	50,000	2,000
Gujarat	2,500
Tamilnad	100,000
Delhi	10,000	1,000
Punjab, Pepsu	100,000
Bihar	400,000
Bengal	100,000
Madhya Pradesh	100,000	7,363
Maharashtra	100,000
Madhya Bharat	100,000	2,000
Rajasthan	200,000	1,000
Vindhya Pradesh	40,000	1,000
Hyderabad	100,000	30,214 (upto 25-10-52)
Extra (incl. Andhra, Tamilnad & Veral)	-	12,100
Total ..	20,25,000	3,63,547

It would appear from the above table that the gifts made in Uttar Pradesh and Hyderabad account for almost the whole of gifts made so far. In U.P. over two-thirds of the target has been achieved. It is therefore necessary to accelerate the pace of Bhodan Yajna in other states, if a great disappointment is to be avoided. There are some states for which no targets have been laid down while the work of the Yajna has gone apace, while in case of others though the targets have been laid, the work of collecting gifts has not started yet. The targets so far fixed total up to 20 lakhs acres as against the target of 25 lakh acres for the next two years.

In view of these facts, Shri Shanker Rao Deo has also started collecting the land gifts and his collection exceeds 11,000 acres. It was recently stated by Shri

Jaya Prakash Narain, the Socialist leader, that he would also devote his time to the Bhoodan Yajna. In a recent circular to Pradesh Committees, the A.I.C.C. Office recently asked congressmen to co-operate in a fuller manner with Acharya Bhave's movement. It was suggested that State Government should pass necessary enactment to legalise the transfers of land. This has already been done in Hyderabad and necessary steps in this connection have already been taken in Uttar Pradesh.

The Bhoomidan Yajna thus conceived is likely to prove a great instrument of social amelioration. But in order to make agriculture a business proposition along with a way of life not only should the land be re-distributed but also the agricultural productivity raised. Peasants should be provided with suitable employments in their leisure hours. It is true that voluntary efforts cannot do much but in so far as they not only show the way but also do things with the concurrence and goodwill of the parties concerned, they achieved much more than the coercive measures of the state. This indeed is the basis of Bhoodan Yajna. The underlying idea of the mission is that ".....every son of the soil, i.e., every man must have a right and a claim on Mother Earth, in the same way as he has over air and water". It is not so much the solution of the problem as the method of its working out that matters more; non-violence thus understood is the test for a man like Acharya Vinoba Bhave who has devoted the whole of his life in the service of his country. That is the real way of Sarvodaya.

AN EXAMPLE TO MANKIND

By

JAMES H. NOYES

Vinoba, quietly talking to a group of Sarvodaya workers in the dawn light at Sewapuri aroused in me a desire common to so many foreigners in India, the urge to force an unnatural simplification over complex problems by means of some figure easily befitting both tradition and the moment. Such glibly formed stereotypes have done much to obscure real understanding abroad. In a world accustomed to thinking of Asia in terms of land problems, peasant uprising, and religion, Vinoba is a tempting symbol for those who would like to cut across all these forces and derive a neat formula. Another temptation, easier to avoid, is encountered by those who are so absorbed with technical problems relating to both land and politics that they would miss the sheer drama and the compelling excitement of Vinoba's experiment.

As I watched Vinoba, I understood for the first time what a powerful force is employed when a moderate begins conducting a revolution, when an individual walks quietly among millions and is able to command by whispers. Those who are afraid his revolution does not go far enough fail to see how radical Vinoba's emphasis on attitude really is. They assume that within the context of extreme problems extremist methods must prevail, not realizing these techniques merely postpone the time when the serious work of dealing with individuals' attitudes toward social change may be taken up. Vinoba stands with those who believe stimulation of compassion in the minds of the masses is not only a more moral but a more effective incentive to social change than stimulation of indifference or hatred. If he is successful he will disappoint those who have banked on the

creation of hatred as a means to political power in India.

At Sewapuri nothing was more arresting to me than the nature of the relationship between Vinoba and the government. Clearly, fundamental differences of approach and ultimate aim separated them. Arguments as to what constituted an economic holding or fragmentation underlay more fundamental disagreements regarding the old questions of cottage industries *vs.* mass production and long range power development *vs.* immediate improvement in existing facilities. The government seemed to feel Bhoomidan merely scratched the surface and could, in some ways, serve to aggravate matters, whereas Vinoba seemed to feel that the agrarian problem was too vast for the government to handle, that their pre-occupation with technical matters distracted them from psychological realities. For one unqualified to pass judgment on these questions the predominant impression created at Sewapuri was regarding the functioning of democratic process. How fortunate for the government to have an individual like Vinoba communicating with villagers in a period when the absence of mass communications is a significant handicap to government planning. How fortunate for Vinoba to have a government willing to give every assistance to initiative and remain sensitive to suggestions. It being obvious that unknown consequences following action on the planning level are one of the significant pitfalls for governments attempting major reforms, Vinoba's stress on the only sure factor, namely, attitude toward the change, appears strikingly valid. But Vinoba is far removed from the mere role of contemplative who is willing to substitute a change of heart for change in institutions, because he knows action must be simultaneous. The state is responsible for developing social conditions which will enable the contemplative to render his teaching practical. Bhawe, therefore, appears in two roles:

the practical man who senses the necessity for concrete and immediate changes in the status of land holdings, and the equally practical contemplative who senses that these changes must be undertaken within the atmosphere of a particular attitude of mind if they are to be untimately successful.

In these two roles, Vinoba seems to demonstrate a host of questions as well as some possible answers. Is it possible, one may ask, that the great power which a single individual can exert over the minds of illiterate villagers constitutes a danger to a nation experimenting in democracy? If an unscrupulous individual were to arrive at the proper formula for influencing the minds of the villagers, what would be the results of his actions prior, for instance, to a general election? How much of Vinoba's success is due to the religious appeal in his message and how much to the practical appeal in terms of recognizing the needs of the majority and to his ingenious playing upon competitive factors relating to the prestige of landowners? Is a revolution more easily understood by the villagers when explained in traditional terms or is it necessary to explain unfamiliar ideologies to them?

Vinoba also appeared a central figure in a process which, no matter how uncertain and often shapeless, may be the most significant indication as to how India is to achieve her identity in the midst of the myraid of cultural forces and 'isms' surrounding her. His work and his reception within India seem one more scene in a long drama of tolerance to varying ideals and methods which many say describes the meaning of Hinduism. In addition, as Vinoba went about his work at Sewapuri, he seemed to me to symbolize India's continuing capacity to produce individuals whose selflessness and dedication form an example to men everywhere.

*Berkeley, California
February 25, 1953*

LIGHT FROM TELENGANA

In the encircling gloom, for a country in the grip of helplessness, the beginning of the transformation in Telengana must mean hope, something to please the eye and touch the heart. The story of the transformation is little known. But something so real needs no advertisement and the newspapers and the news agencies might well be content with the story of pettiness which they unceasingly purvey. Vinoba Bhave is a man of deep humility and it would be wrong to elevate him to the pedestal which living prophets aspire to occupy. But the St. Paul of constructive work has, from his experience of Sarvodaya, devised a programme for himself, unaided by governments and little aided by anybody else. This too is something to touch the heart, because Sarvodaya has largely remained talk. Vinoba started from Wardha to Hyderabad nearly two months ago and his destination was Telengana. Nobody knew when he would return and his message to his co-workers left behind was almost a message of farewell. Telengana is the crux of the Indian problem, in its political, economic and social aspects, a problem which has been well advertised sometimes in the foreign press for the sake of spotlighting our agony of freedom and has fully advertised the failure both of the Government and the Communist. If Vinoba's march was on the lines of Dandi March, which was the prelude to the final phase of the freedom struggle, his tour of Telengana is like Gandhi's tour of Noakhali. It is a mission of mercy with the people as helpless as the Government, though Vinoba would not give his mission any pretentious name. If he chose to go on foot it was not for any display of symbolism but for reasons which reflect the truthfulness and humility of the man. It was only a night's journey from Wardha to

Hyderabad and Vinoba was not boycotting the train or the plane. He wanted even swifter planes than there were and if possible he would like to reach Delhi in an hour. But everything had its limitations; eye-glasses, however useful they might be, would not replace the eyes. If he did not hate modern means of transport, he also could not forget the value of legs, and he preferred to walk because thereby he could not only walk from village to village but visit the smaller villages. The result of the tour among the villages and the talking to the people in their own language Telugu, Marathi or Hindustani, all of which he knows, has been a conversion, slow but enduring.

The value of Vinoba's work, however, unimportant it may seem to the political worker absorbed in the fascinating game of power politics, will be understood by those who are acutely conscious of the problem that is India. Vinoba's speeches and actions explain themselves. Some of the speeches are remarkable not only for the healing touch of sympathy but for the power of insight. If Vinoba is talking ceaselessly of the land problem and village industries, it is because these are the essence of the problem of the countryside. The Telengana problem is not one of violence or non-violence but of landlessness and hunger, of the conflict between the rich landlord and the poor peasant, and of the redistribution which must be imperatively immediate. If Vinoba has chosen the method of persuasion to make the landlords donate land, and hundreds of acres are being daily donated, he has shown by his success that an element of persuasion is not unsuccessful and he has not discarded thought of legislation. The history of land legislation is present vividly in the debate over the proposed amendment of the Constitution and legislation will always have its problems. Nor is Vinoba under the illusion that he is solving the pro-

blem of Telengana. But he has substituted helplessness with self-help and hundreds and thousands of villagers are beginning to give up frustration for hope, and if that hope can help them to get rid of Government violence and Communist violence, they will see freedom in action. Impartially Vinoba has condemned all parties which have contributed to the tension in Telengana. At one place he said that the Government had deputed the police to put down the Communist menace and, instead of discharging their duties properly, the police were looting the people. To the Communists living in hide-outs in the hills because they are heaping atrocities on the people, Vinoba has a message. He admits that the life of Communists is full of sacrifice, that every individual can serve the country and that the Communists must come out openly and serve the people. At some places the people have acknowledged that they are not afraid of the Communists any more but they still want the police, unable to help themselves.

On the problem of village economy, Vinoba has given a message which is simple and direct, without the ornamentation of theory, but it is the only alternative when the planning so far possible has not been able to bear fruit. Freedom, as he says, is not real when free India is full of foreign goods, when the cities still drain the wealth of the villages and make no contribution, when the villages, instead of maintaining their productivity, sink into despair and helplessness. No economic theory of production and distribution has been able to give any better diagnosis of the Indian crisis. Given the land he needs, the cultivator can live only by industries which he can sustain and from which he can derive benefit. But while the land has been languishing under unequal distribution, the industries have been dying from helplessness and want of help. Vinoba has not been against deriving benefit from the experience of other

countries and he has referred to the new China as a country which has been involved in internal conflict for a number of years but which has saved itself from complete ruin through its cottage industries. The way the villagers are helped to misuse their wealth is illustrated in the way good cotton is sent outside and bad cotton kept with them, finally leaving them to the mercy of mill cloth. Whether the political parties will relish his description of them is doubtful but he has correctly said that the Congressmen are concerned with power politics, the Socialists are obsessed with the idea of winning the elections and the Communists are thinking only in terms of violence. Communism would die a natural death unless it gave up violence and he has not denied communism its right to play a constructive role. If any message can be drawn from the work which he is doing, it is that it is not impossible to do without violence and that the ends which communism seeks to serve must be served. No dialectic can afford to deny Vinoba's constructive effort its value; as he has said in answer to the argument that spinning is going back to the past, it does not make sense when there is acute scarcity of cloth. The tour of transformation reminds one of the great tours which Gandhi undertook in the afflicted areas of famine or disorder, preaching his gospels of work and faith and touching the hearts of a people who do not understand the slogans of the cities. 'The light has gone out,' said Nehru when Gandhi died. Yet, as he said, the light cannot die. It lives, however feebly, at least in Telengana, where gloom is deepest.

May 23, 1951

The National Herald, Lucknow.

A GREAT SCHOLAR

Like his master, frail in body, he is, to use the Mahatma's own words "a treasury of knowledge." A great scholar of Sanskrit and Mahrathi, he also knows French, English, Tamil, Telegu, Gujarati and Malayalam. Most of these languages he has taught himself.

An orator of distinction, his speeches are known for precision, brevity and coherence. But despite his many talents and lifelong work in the Mahatma's Ashram, he has successfully evaded publicity.

This by itself, he considers, is an achievement. It is easier to be in the limelight, he thinks more difficult to be out of it. He follows the example of the unknown authors of the Vedas whose works live, not their names.

Only three times before has he struck the headlines, but his prominence was always momentary. He became leader of the Congress national flag satyagraha in 1923 for one night—and that too accidentally. All other members of the committee sponsoring the movement were suddenly arrested. He alone remained to carry on. Next day when under his instructions the movement was to restart, he too was jailed. Coming out three months later, he went back to his cottage in Wardha.

Next year the Mahatma chose him to lead the Guruvayar Satyagraha in Kerala for Harijan temple entry. The smooth studious tenor of his life in the ashram was again shaken when the Mahatma made him the first individual satyagrahi to show India's dislike for the British Government's war policy. Only a few knew Vinoba at the time. For a day he made news and then lapsed into obscurity.

His present move is different. Now in response to an inward urge he proposes to stay on. While

the Congress Government can follow Mahatma Gandhi's teachings in the mundane administrative sphere, Mr. Bhave proposes to counter the growing public belief that any means are good enough if only they achieve the immediate end.

The Mahatma's mission in the last months of his life was to root out religious hatred. Relief and rehabilitation of refugees was necessary but not enough. They needed to be spiritually revived. Mr. Bhave hopes to pick up the broken strings of the Mahatma's efforts.

Already he has made contact with distressed Muslims who regularly come to him for guidance much in the same way as Hindus and Sikhs whom he had visited in their refugee camps to give them a word of cheer and hope asking them at the same time to shed bitterness.

How Mr. Bhave prepared himself for his mission is a long but interesting story. He derives his spiritual leanings from his grandfather who was a learned but orthodox, Brahmin. His father, on the other hand, belonged to the school of thought, popular in the last few years of the 19th century that India could be great if she revived her industries and followed the West in every respect. He failed to convince his three sons. All of them fled from home to join Mahatma Gandhi in his Ashram. All three are bachelors.

Vinoba, the eldest, was the first to leave home in 1916 without even completing his formal education. He had spent his childhood in the village Gagoda, Kolaba District of Bombay Presidency. Among his earliest political recollections are the days of the Bengal partition movement in which Tilak played a prominent part. His fiery nationalist writings were loved by the people. They aroused among them curiosity, about the past glories of the Mahratha

Empire and writings of Mahratha saints and poets. They formed the beginning of Mr. Bhave's researches into Maharashtrian literature. Even as a child he read a great deal of it.

He joined the Government High School in Baroda in 1907. A class fellow of his says: "He was always far ahead of his classmates."

Even in his school days he was known for his memory. What interests him he can commit to memory without effort. He has also developed the art of forgetting what he dislikes. "You cannot make your brain a storehouse of muck," he says. If you want to remember things you must also learn to forget, he believes.

The wave of nationalism turned Mr. Bhave's attention first to political literature, ultimately to the sources of the national revival—ancient religious books. The most important which fitted in with the times was the Gita and Mr. Bhave avidly waited for Tilak's commentary on it. Unable to buy it, he read it day by day in the local library. It helped to confirm his ideal of fighting for a righteous cause.

At about the same time, before leaving his college he had drawn upon the Upanishads.

After much mental debate, he left for Banaras in March 1916. To his father he said he was going to Bombay. Not until he had reached his destination did he disclose to him that he had made up his mind to stay away.

In Banaras he studied the books he loved—the Vedas, having taught himself Sanskrit.

About this time Mahatma Gandhi had returned to India and settled in the Sabarmati Ashram. Looking round for a spiritual and political anchor, Vinoba chose the Mahatma instinctively and wrote

for permission to join his ashram. Without waiting for a reply, he appeared. The Mahatma saw a slim young man and without much ado admitted him.

In 1916 the Mahatma had not yet assumed the leadership of India. In the ashram not very far from Ahmedabad, he lived a simple but rigorous life of which cooking, weaving, grinding and scavenging were essential features. Here was a school of national workers whom the Mahatma was to employ in the coming struggle.

Vinoba found in the Mahatma a restless spirit like his own, yearning to express itself in the national interest. He willingly submitted himself to the hard discipline. The Mahatma watched him from a distance while he carried heavy buckets of water from the nearby well. He was impressed by the little man's uncomplaining efforts. He never demurred, though eventually his health broke down.

The Mahatma, hearing about it talked to him for the first time—alone. He inquired how he managed to put in so much work despite his health. "By the will to work," said the young man. Impressed by Vinoba's enthusiasm, the Mahatma advised him rest.

For a whole year he was away and came back to find a warm welcome from the Mahatma. "You are no longer for this ashram. The ashram is for you," he said.

During his rest at Satara he increased his knowledge of Sanskrit reading Brahama Sutras and Vedantic philosophy and by attending a Pathshala. On his return to the ashram he took to teaching boys and has continued this ever since.

In the meantime the Mahatma was being drawn more and more into active politics. In 1919 when the first protest week against the Rowlatt Bill was observed members of the ashram, including Mr. Bhawe,

for the first time went out to preach the gospel of non-violence to unruly crowds in Ahmedabad. When at last, Mahatma Gandhi took leave of the ashramites to lead the movement, he asked Mr. Bhawe to take general charge of the inmates. His ability, devotion and quiet enthusiasm had gained general recognition.

In 1921, when the Mahatma decided to open a branch of his ashram at Wardha he selected Vinoba to take complete charge of it. He has always been known as "Acharya" (head) of the Wardha ashram.

Between 1933 and 1937 he lived in the Harijan colony near Wardha and has since settled at Pavnar, a village five miles from Wardha, where his admirers have built an Ashram, called "God's abode."

April 12, 1948

The Statesman, New Delhi.

BHU-DAN YAJNA

by

SURESH RAMBHAI

It was on the celebrated day of April 18, 1951 that Acharya Vinoba Bhave, India's first Satyagrahi of the Second World War, launched his movement of the Bhū-Dan Yajna. Since then he has covered several districts of Hyderabad State, Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Bharat, Vindhya Pradesh and almost every district of the Uttar Pradesh. On September 14, last he left U.P. for Bihar where he is carrying on his mission these days. By now he has obtained on behalf of the dumb millions of India several lakhs of acres of land for distribution among the landless. The last eighteen months have shown the efficacy and potentialities of the non-violent way to solve economic problems. Springing from the depths of India's soul, Vinoba's technique has appealed to the masses. It has also attracted the attention of the intelligentsia of the country. Nay, of late, serious students of economics, beyond the shores of India, have begun to view it with sympathetic concern.

As is well known Vinoba commenced his campaign in the Telugu-speaking eastern parts of Hyderabad State—known as Telengana where the Communists, by sheer dint of selfless service and sacrifice stretching for a number of years, had richly earned the trust of the peasantry. But the germ of the movement had gained ground in Vinoba's mind long earlier. During this campaign he has come in contact with all shades of people and all types of political groups or parties, not excluding Communists and the Communist Party. He has also had the honour to receive welcome-addresses from the Com-

munists who, at places, did help him in his movement as well. But recently they have begun to give the Bhu-dan Yajna movement bad names, calling it a "farce" to perpetuate exploitation and to distract the attention of the people from finding a correct solution of the land problem.

I have carefully gone through the Communist censure or criticism of the Bhu-Dan Yajna. The impression left there at upon me is that perhaps they neither try to keep in touch with the progress of Vinoba's movement nor care to go through any literature in this connection. Whatever may be said against the Communists or their activities, but everybody recognises their urge for learning and their earnestness to keep up-to-date in matters political and economic. Yet I must confess that their recent writings have set me a-thinking and I wonder whether New Delhi's Rashtrapati Bhawan style has warped the tenor of their life as well. If true, it is a very sad development indeed.

A writer in one of the articles, prominently displayed in the Communist Press, says that "in his very first speech in Bihar, Vinobaji had a full go at the Communists", meaning thereby that Vinoba is either an enemy of Communists or is afraid of them. He is neither. If they could rip open his heart they would find, as he said in a post-prayer speech on 24th September last:

"My Yajna did begin in Telengana, but not because of Communists. I want to assure my Communist friends that I bear no ill-feeling towards them. On the other hand, my feelings are good. God made a mistake in not equipping the breast with a window to know the inside of one's heart. Had there been one you would find that I am full of love towards the Communists."

Nay, in May 1951 he declared at Warangal:

"The rich can be done away with without a pistol, for every adult has now the right to vote. In future the Government would belong to every individual. I beg of the Communists to come out into the open and work. Could they work in the open I would give them my complete co-operation."

No friend of the Communists can go farther.

The second serious objection raised against the Yajna is that the 'vast majority of donors are middle and even poor kisans' who themselves come 'within the category of the exploited and who are themselves producers'. The Communists are at a loss to follow 'how taking land from these people can be termed ending of exploitation.' Also it is alleged that the land given by big landlords is sometimes of the worthless and uncultivable variety, and the donation is more in the nature of a face-saving attempt than that of really helping the down-trodden. Both of these objections are true. But they are as old as the movement itself.

Vinoba accepts the gift of the poor because his movement is a Yajna in which everybody must offer what he or she can. What counts is not the 'poverty' of the possessions of the donor but the 'richness' of his heart. And who does not know that those called poor have a richer heart? For did not Jesus say: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God?" If the rich do not easily part with their land it is no ground to reject the offer of the poor. It simply shows that the haves have not yet so much grasped the substance of Vinoba's movement as the have-nots have done.

No doubt the rich landlord donates quite often to gain something—official favours, name or what not.

Sometimes he parts with disputed portion of his property to kill, as he would fondly imagine, two birds with one stone. Vinoba is deeply aware of these, call them tricks or intrigues. But this does not disturb him and his confident reply is:

"I am an ocean in which rivers come with all types of waters—dirty, hard, soft or fine. I accept them with full grace."

And to the query that the rich give only a very small portion his fearless answer is:

"Let them give today what they can. More they will give to-morrow and the balance the day after. For, all land is mine, not theirs. SABAI BHUMI GOPAL KI (All land belongs to God)."

Thus it is Vinoba's irrevocable belief in the gradual conversion of the heart that he swallows every pill, sweet or sour. Conversion there shall be. The Communists cannot cast off this faith in conversion. After all nobody is a Communist by birth. He or she gets converted to it at a certain stage in one's life. And frequently this conversion comes about in a very non-violent manner.

Conversion is intimately connected with the idea of Sarvodaya, i.e. the ever greatest good of one and all. Again, here is a very great misunderstanding—some of our Communist and leftist friends regard Sarvodaya principle as the 'maintaining of the status quo'. This is no more true than any American propagandist's assertion that India's Community Projects are a part of the Gandhian Constructive programme. They are not. In fact, launching them on Bapu's birthday was an attempt, as Mirabeau says, to tear Bapu's heart asunder. So also Sarvodaya unequivocally stands for a change in the established order. Had it meant maintenance of status-quo India would not have produced Gandhi nor Vinoba would have

begged from door to door. Sarvodaya aims, as Communism does, at a classless and casteless society. The ends of the two are the same. But the means are different and that accounts for all the difference between the two.

This brings us to another objection against the Bhu-Dan Yajna—that it has not “brought even an iota of change in the social structure.” Surely Vinoba never imagined that his walking down twelve miles every morning would change the social structure in that area. No reformer, thinker or leader ever did or could do so. Even the morning sun which can melt the hardest snow of the tallest cliff fails to awake one and all. It brings about a change in the life of only those who are prepared to leave their bed. It is helpless against those who have no inclination to get up. We are to judge the success of the Bhu-Dan Yajna not by what it has not achieved but by what it has done, small though it be. And it can hardly be denied that it has changed the heart of some persons to some extent. And to that extent it has changed the mental structure of the society. Mark, I do not say social structure. For land problem alone will not solve or build up the whole structure. It will only help changing it. Also Vinoba makes no claim:

“I am not trying to solve the big land problem. I do want it solved peacefully, but nobody could settle all the world’s affairs. Ram had been there and Krishna had been there. They had done what they could do for the world, but there is no end to problems. One can only do one’s work.”

All that he proposes to do is to change the atmosphere—just to create the right consciousness among the people.

It is, therefore, very regrettable that the Communist friends have, deliberately or otherwise, fallen

foul of the Bhu-Dan Yajna. Had they gone deeper they would have easily realised the full implications of it. This is perhaps why Dr. J. C. Kumarappa often says, "I have gone round the world. I have been to China and to Russia. But I found Communists nowhere except in India."

What, after all, is the reason of this antipathy towards the Bhu-Dan-Yajna? Perhaps it lies in the association of the Congress and the Praja-Socialist Party with it. Hence on grounds of blind party-politics, what the non-Communists do must be condemned by the Communists and vice-versa. I am afraid this is a very wrong conception of public service. Following regulated party lines reduces us to mere sepoys for whom the spinal chord was more than enough. In the long run this attitude harms the country as also the party and the individual. In this connection I cannot help reproducing the beautiful words of New China's maker, Mao Tse-tung, to Shrimati Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit: "Let us unite for construction; let us unite for peace". India's misfortune is that Congressmen or Communists, Praja-Socialists or Jan Sanghites, etc., cannot unite or construction or peace or for anything else. And the country is reduced to the unenviable position of the proverbial patient whose malady gets deeper with every treatment.

To call Bhu-Dan Yajna a 'farce' or means to perpetuate exploitation is adding insult to injury. For who is Vinoba and what is his Bhu-Dan Yajna? Vinoba is a Satyagrahi and his Bhu-Dan Yajna is his invisible Satyagraha to win India's economic and moral and social liberty. He is not a street beggar to amass lands. He is a revolutionary who has begun his Satyagraha march. As he said at the last Sarvodaya Conference at Sevapuri (Banaras):

"I want to tell you that if I command any honour it is as a Satyagrahi. I know no other

honour. Therefore, if Satyagraha is required I shall invariably offer it.....Believe me when I say that I have never harboured any thought that did not bear fruit."

Both the Congressmen and Communists would do well to grasp the real significance of the Bhu-Dan Yajna movement. If the former imagine that their co-operation in the Yajna will help them to implement their present policy so as to go on holding reins of power for all time they are sadly mistaken. If the latter imagine that the Yajna will not touch the existing state of affairs they are equally misled. Both of them should know that the same Vinoba who was asking for only land yesterday has already made a call for income. And rest assured that tomorrow he is going to demand everything else for Daridra Narain—a Sarv-Dan Yajna, a call for total donation. Doubtless he will also call those in power to part with it for the powerless. His is a battle on behalf of the poor, the have-nots, the non-possessioned, the powerless, the lowly or the lost. One would do well to decide and take sides accordingly before it is too late.

INDIA'S WALKING MESSIAH

By

GEORGE WELLER

At three o'clock every morning, in some dark village of India, the slumber of the poor is broken by a series of strange noises. Twelve handclaps, dry and commanding, echo through the labyrinth of mud houses where men and animals sleep. A little bell tinkles. Then twenty pairs of sandals move out, slip-slapping among the houses. A kerosene lantern winks by. Presently, when the shuffling sandals are gone, there drift back the notes of a hymn of peace, sung in marching rhythm. Vinoba Bhave, India's walking messiah, and his disciples have taken to the road again.

Vinoba is fifty-seven. A duodenal ulcer is gnawing at his stomach, and dysentery plagues his daily journey of fifteen to twenty miles. Somewhere among the thousands of villages awaiting him is one where he will lie down for ever. When he does, the Communist Party will be relieved of its most formidable unarmed antagonist in Asia, perhaps in the world; for Vinoba has undertaken single-handed a programme of redistributing India's land. Already Indian landowners have given him nearly 50,000 acres, often in single acres or fractions, though his only weapons are moral suasion and his own prestige as a mahatma, a "great soul."

Vinoba does not badger the landowners, as the Communists do, before a mob of land-hungry peasants steered by a clique of party members. When he arrives at a village he calls the landowners together quietly, under a tree or by a brook, and they are surprised and mollified at being invited to express their views to him privately. He listens closely,

lying at full length like a withered Cæsar, a brown skinny shoulder exposed, supporting himself on one elbow. "We are sorry, but we cannot help you," the landowners mutter, between pious fear and indignant martyrdom. "We simply cannot spare any land." "I have three sons and only twenty acres. Do not expect me to cut off my sons to help out some stranger." Experience has taught Vinoba how to handle this objection. Patting the farmer on the shoulder, he says quietly, "Consider me as your fourth son. Father, I am asking you for my own share, no more." The idea of having a mahatma in the family is almost irresistible, even to a hardboiled farmer. Then Vinoba speaks confidentially of his belief that rich and poor are brothers, quoting Sanskrit wisdom on the uses of property and proverbs on the virtue of giving.

The quiet meeting with the landowners lasts usually an hour or so, and ends in a gentlemanly deadlock. The landowners politely stall off a decision. Nobody wants to break the common front by giving anything. "All right," says Vinoba. "So be it. Tommorrow I shall be gone and you will all keep your land. But I warn you: trouble is ahead." A long, painful silence follows, Vinoba lying on his back with his eyes closed, the owners trying to read each other's faces. "We have so little now," mourns one. Vinoba snaps upright: "You have little, but others have less." His nurse brings him his collapsible spinning wheel in its case like a trombone, and he sets it up and begins spinning. The owners shuffle away.

But they are still not free of Vinoba. Indians are proud. Can a mahatma be permitted to walk on to the next village and avow the fact—which will reach there hours before him—that the rich here are both impious and mean? There is another, more local danger. In the public meeting an hour hence, when

India's Walking Messiah

Vinoba appears before the whole village, not just the same landowners, some little two-acre man, mesmerized by Vinoba or simply mischievous, may rise and give away a sixth of his puny holdings. Then how will the great ones look? Anyone who holds village office by virtue of landed eminence will seem indifferent to his local good name. It is necessary to give Vinoba something—a token, say.

By the time the public meeting opens the landowners have put their heads together behind a tree and scrapped together a few acres. Hoping Vinoba will stay at a safe distance, they send him a message that they will "help him," without mentioning any figures. Sometimes they resort to floral flattery to get him on the road sooner. "Have I come for garlands?" demands Vinoba. "I have a garden if I want a bouquet. Tell me how much land you will give." He walks nervously around in a circle of squatting farmers, with their wives and children. He denounces nobody. Does any small farmer want to set an example to the rich? One or two hands are timidly elevated.

The substantial landowners now see themselves outflanked. When they break down, their answer is usually the one I heard given to Vinoba in the United Provinces. "We cannot actually spare you an inch of land. But because you are a mahatma, we cannot let you leave us empty-handed."

Yet Vinoba somehow leaves the farmers with a sense of having solved their own troubles, respectably and independently. The rich, because they have given "voluntarily," are ennobled and dignified. The poor have a divided gratitude—to the departed Vinoba, to the remaining rich, and to God, whom Vinoba summons to witness and sanctify the gift.

Being a practical saint, Vinoba is not satisfied with the almighty registrar of deeds. He also ties up giver and getter with a regular lawful deed, signed and humanly witnessed. Knowing the poor man's temptation to make an easy rupee, Vinoba nails down the new owner with a clause forbidding transfer for ten years. He has even squeezed the state into a little giving. The farmers are exempt from the three percent transfer tax. And if the land has been waste and the farmer clears and plants it within two years, he pays no taxes.

"When you awaken tomorrow I shall be gone. But in reality I shall still be with you," he tells his villages. He is, too. He leaves helpers behind with the villagers, in joint committee, to see that the land is fairly handed out, with preference for the landless and the untouchables. He keeps his rear guard alert. "People know loopholes in any law better than the lawmakers themselves," he warns them. Gandhi, who never was fooled by Vinoba's self-depreciation, once said: "He has an army of disciples and workers who would rise to any sacrifice at his bidding." To lock the stitches after Vinoba has passed is no petty task, because on one pilgrimage in northern India he averaged 285 acres a day, and on another in Hyderabad he averaged 200 acres a day.

Vinoba's method has this drawback: it hits the man with middle-sized holdings but not the large absentee owner. Among 563 donors in Madhya Pradesh, 541 gave less than 25 acres and only thirteen over a hundred. Vinoba has not worked out any sure way of getting at the remote rich. The best he can do is to sour the lesser landowners against them, and thereby increase the tension on their local overseers. Some day he may enter the cities, which he calls a "jungle of brutes," and hunt down the big owners.

India's Walking Messiah

However, only the rich—and—obscure dare go underground in the cities when Vinoba approaches; the rich—and—prominent must line up humbly to be plundered by the apostle. At Delhi, the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, entered shoeless the grass shack erected by the Government for Vinoba beside the memorial—altar—where Gandhi was cremated, and invited Vinoba to help himself to his estates in Bihar.

"People want a revolutionary programme," he tells India, "and think that a revolution cannot be wrought without bloodshed. I cannot accept their contention. They are not revolutionists at all. They are status-quo-ists. Their object is not a revolution, but to cause an exchange of places between the present happy and unhappy one. A revolution must signify universal happiness without exception. While the Western mind is trained to think in terms of the greatest good of the greatest number, the Indian mind from childhood is taught to think in terms of the good of all."

For the harassed Nehru the emergence of Vinoba has been a piece of sublime good luck. He holds the Communists at bay while the Congress Party stumbles towards a formula in the confusion of a cloudy socialist leadership. He comes along just in time to take over where Patel, the Tammany boss of India, left off. Patel, a heavy-lidded bullfrog who ran the Congress machine, was death on Communism. He even rebuked Sheikh Abdullah, Nehru's friend and dictator of Kashmir, when that tall rebel took the Communist side in speeches about Korea. But Patel died, and the Congress Government was left without a figure tough enough and uncompromised enough internationally to meet the menace of armed uprising.

Vinoba showed how the job could be done. He did it without help from his own Government, a

Government obsessed with forcing Communist China into the UN and giving Formosa to the Communists. Starting two years late, Vinoba saved Hyderabad, the Kansas of India, from being either seized by an army of Communist rebels or wrecked by anti-Communist posses of landlord-dominated state government. But for Vinoba, Hyderabad today might be a Communist fortress in the middle of India.

The Communist plan to capture India is unusual. Unlike other national Communist parties with borders adjacent to China and near Russia, the Indian Communists count little on a ready-made victory handed them by a foreign Communist army. The Himalayas are too high, the passes too tight. The Indian Army command apparently has not been penetrated by Communists riding on the Kashmir issue, as the Pakistan staff was before it was purged. In India, the Communist plan is to organize farmers and landless labourers locally, and gradually to effect the dismemberment of the nation state by state. The crowbar is "the right of secession"—a privilege which has been guaranteed, with great propaganda foresight, in the constitution of the USSR, though of course never invoked there.

This plan of winning India by amputation is a special strategy adapted to Indian conditions. India does not have enough industrial workers to furnish the street-fighting militia of Communism. Nor does she have Communist guerrillas left over from war, like those of China and South-east Asia, because her national army got first grip on the British guns and grenades. But she has millions of farmers. The Communist aim is to shape them through local bands of night raiders into that missing guerrilla force, creating a kind of Ku Klux Klan of Communism.

The state selected for the first attempt at power was Hyderabad. With a Moslem prince ruling a

Hindu population, Hyderabad had been taken forcibly into the Indian Union by an invasion of the Indian Army "to preserve order." Its people were theoretically ready for a Communist call to break away again. Hyderabad also looked promising for a class war, because the rich landowners were squeezing the sharecroppers unmercifully. The poor were sunk not only in hunger but drunkenness, rarely a Hindu vice.

Hoping for a quick capture of the weakened state, the Communists shortened the opening phase of "peaceful" enrolment and jumped straight into a semi-underground offensive. They distributed arms obtained in the melee of civil war with a simple programme: "Arrest the landlords. Seize the Government." While the Indian Federal Army stayed aloof, the Hyderabad state constabulary became locked in a struggle with the Communist night raiders. In one province, Telengana, the Communists won. They arrested the landlords, killed a few, and distributed their lands. They set up their own police, schools, and tax collectors. They killed their "enemies" and sniped away at the state troopers.

Then they intensified their sermons of secession around the whole clockface of India: in Travancore in the south-west, among the Sikhs, of the north-west, among the Gurkha tea workers on the Tibetan border near Darjeeling, among the Naga hillmen of Assam, and the Dravidian peoples of eastern India. In Assam they even succeeded in promoting a cheap diversion simultaneously with the main show in Hyderabad.

When Vinoba decided last March to walk into Communist Hyderabad there was much guesswork as to whether he would be killed or converted. The Communist favoured giving the lands of the rich to the poor. So did Vinoba. An alliance seemed in the making. In Iran the Communist Tudeh party

had wrapped up the elderly Moslem high priest Ayatollah Kashani by the simple process of flattering him with the grand-old-man technique. Their Indian comrades might do the same with Vinoba. After all, even Gandhi had declared himself a Communist, though one who abjured the party's "secret, violent, and deceitful methods."

Another tie between Vinoba and the Communists was that many of them were in jail as political criminals, and Vinoba had spent four years in jail himself. Indeed, for many years jail has been the place to begin a career of leadership in India. Old Congress rebels, now paunchy bureaucrats, used to hold parties to celebrate "the anniversary of my jail-going." Moreover, Vinoba was at the time disgusted with wasteful governmental methods, and he knew that official attempts at land reform in Hyderabad had been bungled in such a way that many farmers had joined the Communists.

But from the beginning Vinoba felt that India was bigger and deeper than any foreign doctrine. He looked at the Communists coolly. "Before the Moslem soldier came to India with his sword," he said, "the fakir came with his teaching." Capitalism and imperialism came from the West and their touch on India was "both bitter and sweet." Similarly today, he felt, "The new thought currents like socialism and Communism have arrived from the West and they have come to stay.....Indian culture will lose nothing thereby. The scum will be washed off and a new culture produced."

Ever since Gandhi's murder, Vinoba admitted later, he had been watching the Communist efforts to take Hyderabad. "I confess that the incendiary and murderous activities did not unnerve me, because I know that the birth of a new culture has always

been accompanied in the past by blood baths. What is needed is not to get panicky, but to keep our heads cool and find a peaceful means of resolving the conflict. The police are not expected to think out and institute reforms. To clear a jungle of tigers their employment would be useful. But here we have to deal with human beings, however mistaken and misguided. When a new idea is born, new repression cannot combat it."

Vinoba drew some of the martyrdom from the Communist prisoners by immediately visiting them in jail at Warangal. They demanded that he work for their release. Drawing on his own experience in jail, Vinoba said: "The thing you must do is keep busy. Ask the officials, as we used to ask the British, for work to keep yourself healthy." He visited his own former jail at Dhulia, where the Communists were excused from labour. "Ask for more work for your hands," was his stern advice.

Vinoba told the Communists that they had bungled their reform by terrorism. "Do you think the ideas of the rich have been changed?" he asked. "Not at all. They have simply deceived you." By violent change at gunpoint, Vinoba explained, the Communists had called down the brutal reaction by state troopers. They had wrecked their own reforms.

Then Vinoba began walking out into the villages to find out if there was another way than the Communist gun for getting land for the land-hungry. The first job, he found, was not to wheedle land but to calm the frightened farmers. Villages numbering hundreds of families had been terrified by a handful of armed night raiders. At Puchapalli he found a populace of 3,000 totally controlled by a dozen armed Communists, who had killed twenty. At Vavilapalli a young man put their dilemma before Vinoba:

"Communist guerrilla ask us for food. If we refuse, they threaten us with death. If we submit, the police threaten us with punishment. What shall we do?"

"Be fearless," replied Vinoba. "If someone enters your home forcibly for food, there is no duty laid on you to comply with him."

"Yes, but then they will kill us. Are we supposed to invite death?"

"Death is an inevitability, and if God wills it today it cannot be postponed. But if they have no sanction from above, the Communists, whatever their number and however deadly their weapons, are powerless to inflict harm. You must give up the fear of death. . . . Those who fear death have ceased to live. They are dead already. Bare your chests when the enemy comes to us with a gun. He is a brother and we must have pity on him. Face him with complete equanimity and tell him he can kill and take away whatever he likes."

Nobody has tried this method of meeting Communists in Asia. In the Western onlooker it arouses skepticism and ridicule, and a little even in the Indian. But not so long ago there was a whole generation of people, including Westernized Indians, to whom Gandhi appeared preposterous. Vinoba has developed methods different from Gandhi's against an enemy far more callous and indifferent to civil rights. Essentially, however, he is Gandhi's moral heir.

Gandhi used up all the moral oxygen in India and the British Raj suffocated. Vinoba is using the same method on the Communists. "The force of arms is no match to the force of atma, the soul. But the Communists have no faith in atma; they believe only in force of arms. If they persist in their erroneous

belief and in the violence it enjoins, they will meet their doom in India, for the people will cease to have any confidence in them."

In Hyderabad Vinoba pinned the guilt where it belonged. "Now that everyone has a right to vote," he said, "and the way is open to change the Government according to the will of the people, there is no necessity to resort to violent methods." Ceaselessly he invited the guerrillas to leave hiding and try legal contest through the ballot. "I say to the Communists only that they should stop coming at night. Take a lesson from me. Be bold. Come by daylight." They answered him with pamphlets of derision.

In one Hyderabad village Vinoba told the farmers he had wrung nearly 100 acres out of the past eight villages. "Today I am going to dispossess you, too, of some of your lands. The Communists will speak slightly of it and say: 'How can it help if those who have 5,000 acres give away a hundred?' I advise them to be patient. An owner may give only a little. Yet what he gives, he gives with love. That is why I accept his gift. I know that the rest too shall come to me."

"The Communists dub me a simpleton. But I tell them that I know my trade. Let there be created an atmosphere, in however small a measure, an atmosphere that this kind of giving is good for the community, for the rich as well as the poor. Then I shall take the next step and move for the necessary laws." At first he asked the villagers to make co-operatives of their new land, but soon discarded the experiment, "Co-operative farming," he decided, "requires a knowledge of arithmetic of which the villagers are innocent, and therefore frightened."

Vinoba's tactics gradually evolved into something more realistic than telling the farmers to sub-

mit bravely. He ended by relying on Gandhi's method with the British, countering fire-power with numbers. "The night raiders are only a couple or so," he told the farmers. "But you are thousands. Form your own volunteer corps to guard your villages. They must be trained to act efficiently. If you discard fear, the Communists will stop fighting you. Once they know the people are fearless, they will quit."

As Vinoba zig-zagged across Telengana, the night raiding bands began to break up. The midnight raps at the door, the barnyard executions, tapered off. The unjailed Communists began treating with the government through a front "progressive" party formed for the purpose. They adopted Vinoba's advice of running for election, naturally with no thanks to him. Many came down from the mountain arsenals. Even Vinoba does not attribute this change to his influence alone; he recognizes that Lenin's Maxim, "Combine legal and illegal methods," is still axiomatic. But Vinoba did halt the killing, mitigate the government repression, and bring the issue out into the fair arena of the ballot.

"If the Communists here," Vinoba told a village, "give up their faith in force of arms, they would find even me joining hands with them. I would then declare that I too am a Communist. But their technique till now has been to create dissensions in every village and set them fighting against each other. Mine is to unite and build them into an integrated community of love." Vinoba has not saved India from Communism yet, and he cannot save it alone. But very slowly he is showing India that there really is another way out.

All this was done by a saintly scholar who had no previous experience in class war. Gandhi had pass-

ed over both Patel and Nehru to choose him to lead civil resistance against the British. But Vinoba had been long demobilized and was on the verge of being walled up in the Gandhian epoch. Some people, indeed, thought he was already dead.

Yet, by Indian standards, Vinoba had been pretty well prepared for his present work. Rebellion and self-sacrifice are in his blood. His grandfather had dared to bring untouchables into a Hindu temple. When Vinoba was a boy of ten, he took a vow of celibacy, gave up sweets, and began going barefoot. Though he later relapsed into wearing sandals against the burning surface of main highways, he still kicks them off as soon as he feels the country dust between his toes.

When he was twenty, Vinoba's parents packed him off to Bombay to be examined for university studies, but he jumped from the train and took another for Bengal, the cradle of rebels. He sent his parents a letter: "I do not go to Bombay. I go elsewhere. But wherever I shall go and whatever I shall do, please rest assured that I will not do anything against good morality."

He went to Banaras, studied Sanskrit, and ate at a free kitchen for the poor. In February, 1916, he saw Gandhi for the first time and was invited to visit his community at Sabarmati. When he came back to the university he gathered his philosophical theses and heaved them into the Ganges to mingle with the seaward-bound ashes of the cremated dead. Joining Gandhi at Sabarmati, he spent hours spinning thread, grinding corn, and listening to the sage. Gandhi wrote his parents: "Your son has developed unusual brilliancy of character and saintliness for his age."

Gandhi sent the young man to study under a religious teacher named Narayan Shastri. "Practise

self-discipline and return to me in two years," Gandhi ordered. Vinoba reduced his clothing to a single garment. He cut out salt. He slept on the ground. Then he asked by mail for tests of his spiritual progress. Gandhi answered: "Your love and purity of character overwhelm me. I am incapable of testing you." When Vinoba at twenty-five placed himself again before Gandhi, the old leader adopted the young disciple as his son.

At the time when Gandhi, being one generation ahead of Vinoba, was defying the British by his salt marches and other challenges, Vinoba was submerging himself in Hinduism, studying and preaching from the Bhagavad Gita, which is still his source. As Gandhi remarked, Vinoba was "never in the limelight on any political platform."

Vinoba aimed to liberate himself from money even more fully than Gandhi. Gandhi, to oil his various projects, had to accept cash contributions, but Vinoba kept himself outside the little Gandhi trusts. In life Gandhi benefited much from the aid of the industrialist Birla, but after the leader's death Vinoba strongly advised against calling upon the angel Birla for money again. He himself refuses cash gifts. A merchant without land offered him 1,000 rupees. Vinoba replied: "Go, buy some land for me. Or dig me a well. Or buy me bullocks to give away." No collection is taken at his meetings. All he and his dozen or so disciples accept for themselves is two meals and floor space in the school or village hall. He wants farmers to pay debts and taxes in kind, not money. Money annoys him by fluctuating. He wants payments for labour to be made by hourly units.

Vinoba's plans for India are the reverse of those of R. K. Patil, her chief planner. Patil wants more

India's Walking Messiah

bigness, more dams and power plants, built with American aid. Vinoba wants more smallness, more wells and village production. He cannot wait for the big dams, not with the Himalaya glaciers shrinking and the rivers falling. He mistrusts foreign loans, such as Ambassador Chester Bowles is getting for India, because they promote "bigness."

Vinoba is also against Nehru's pendulum policy of alternately taking pseudo-loans (actually gifts) from the United States—"begging," Vinoba calls it—and then demonstrating "independence" by backing Chinese Communist imperialism. He wants India to drop rationing and encourage the farmer by a free market price. "If America and other countries give us grain, will they do so out of love or out of a desire to tie us down to their convenience? Shall we go to America for alms? No, friends. Let us worship Shrama Devata, the god of work, and ask him to give us food."

On the population problem Vinoba is an optimist. While the Indian Government openly pleads with the people to cut down their breeding (the present net increase is 40,00,000 annually), Vinoba says, "I do not believe India is overpopulated. In Japan the pressure of population on soil is four times greater. The remedy is not birth control, but in uplifting the living conditions. In Russia the prestige of parents rises with the number of children. The cry of less children is suicidal for the defence of your country."

Like Gandhi, Vinoba believes in putting India's idle rural hands to work at individual machines, especially the spinning wheel. He and all his followers, even on the march, spin at least one hour daily. But he does not hesitate to use a beaten-up truck to carry their bedrolls from one village to the next. "We shall disintegrate the machine age, but

only after we have drawn out all that is good in it." He believes India needs a great diffusion of small machines and a more decentralized system of production, based on the village, not the city. Planning must start with putting people to work, not machines.

Assaulted everywhere by supplicating sharecroppers, Vinoba scolds as well as comforts them: "If you don't help yourselves, God won't help you. He can't shower food and clothing. His mercy can be manifested only in the form of rains on the fields. It is you who have to sow seed for food and cotton for cloth. If you go on snoozing after sunrise, how can you enjoy fully the warmth of the rising sun?"

His gospel of self-help often upsets his hearers. At a village in Madhya Pradesh, the villagers complained that deaths were increasing and asked him to wangle a hospital from the government. Vinoba told them that diet, not disease, was their trouble. "Give thanks to God that you have no hospital. Eat sensibly. Grow herbs and use them as medicine. If you start a hospital, your money will be drained to foreign countries through buying medicine. You'll lose your money and your health, too."

"I see the salvation of India," Vinoba says, "only through this double-edged weapon: performance of bodily labour and freedom from the lure of money. In it I see the acme of Gandhi's philosophy, a synthesis with Communism and an antidote against both Communism and capitalism."

Open-minded as a teacher, Vinoba draws upon practical farming and prayer about equally in formulating his doctrine. Though met everywhere by passionate edulation, he remains free of both delusions of grandeur and pride of poverty. When All-India Radio, the government's nationwide hookup, pleads with him for a long sermon, he gives them

only two or three minutes. "The time is not yet ripe," he says. He won't take short cuts by air, "because my work would be lost in the air, and none get done on the ground."

Meditating out loud about his givers, Vinoba inquires, "Have they gone mad? What makes them part with their land, which is so dear to them? They have come to realize that revolution is imminent. They don't want the Indian revolution to be one of a kind with Russia and China. They realize that mine is the only way to bring about non-violent revolution. So they are voluntarily parting with their estates. Solve land, and you have solved all the problems of the world."

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A PORTRAIT SKETCH

By

HALLAM TENNYSON

India, the land of pilgrims; has added a new variety to its antique and exotic assortment: Vinoba Bhave, the leader and inspirer of the Land Gifts' Mission. Any morning at 4 o'clock you can see him and his companions trudging from village to village under a twilight sky. Behind lumbars a covered oxcart. And it's not until you look inside this cart that you realise that Vinoba is leading a new kind of pilgrimage. He himself is the very picture of a pre-historic Hindu sage. He is bent and bearded and carries a staff. He walks barefoot, swathed in coarse homespun. But the cart contains articles not usually indulged in by Indian ascetics. Among the bundles of bedding there are typewriters, stationery and a filing cabinet. For the cart is the Mobile office of a Mission which, in two years, has collected no less than one million acres of land as free gifts for landless peasants. If it reaches its target of 50 million, the Mission will have achieved the largest peaceful revolution in history.

Birth of the Mission

The Land Gifts' Mission started in 1951. That spring there was a meeting of rural workers in Hyderabad in an area where Communist agitators were murdering their landlords. Vinobaji never uses money, so he decided to walk to this meeting although it was some 300 miles away from where he lived. On the way, in every village through which he passed, he came face to face with the misery of the landless peasants. When he reached Hyderabad he went

straight to a village where Communist violence was daily expected and appealed to the landlords: "If you had four sons and a fifth was born", he said, "you would certainly give him a share of your land. Treat me as your fifth son and give me my share." Being Hindus the landlords' imaginations were touched. Land was given, and the Land Gifts' Mission was born. In his two months in Hyderabad Vinobaji received nearly 12,000 acres in trust for the landless. The Communists there have never regained their hold.

From Hyderabad Vinobaji was invited to Delhi to meet the Pundits of the Planning Commission. It took him two months to walk the 600 miles, but on the way he received 18,000 acres. From then on, the rest of India began to compete for his services. And like Felix the Cat, Vinobaji just keeps on walking.
Vinobaji's Secret

What is Vinobaji's secret? When I first met him 5 years ago his name was known to very few. He lived in seclusion in a village in Central India. The day of my visit was a day of perishing heat, dust and monkeys. Vinobaji, undeterred by any of them sat spinning on the verandah of his mud hut. He talked of his experiments in self-sufficiency. He had a quick nervous smile and blinked at me over the top of his battered steel-rimmed spectacles. Then he returned to his spinning. His thin, frail body and his grey beard, made him look much older than his 52 years—a modern St. Simeon Stylites, reserved, recluse, austere. I was told that he had once been a scholar and had given up everything to lead the life of an obscure peasant. I was awe-struck but a little puzzled I did not see how such a life, restricted by its bottle-neck of high principles, could ever affect the work-a-day world.

I ought to have known better. India honours one thing above all,—Renunciation. Renunciation of worldly possessions, that ideal finds its echo in every Hindu heart. Even industrial tycoons are still apt suddenly to throw up everything and retire to die in a mud hut by the Ganges. Vinobaji has reversed this process. At the age of 57, when most people think of retirement, Vinobaji has emerged from it.

It was Gandhiji who first demonstrated the powerful effect on his countrymen of renouncing wealth for the sake of human service rather than personal salvation. Vinobaji has trodden the same pathway into India's heart. He has no possessions beyond a spinning-wheel and a few home-spun clothes. Hundreds of people have offered him their cars so that he could move more quickly from village to village. They believe he would get more work done. But Vinobaji courteously refused such offers. The peasants can't afford cars and he knows better than to break the magic bond of sympathy that binds him to the peasants. Again Vinobaji suffers from ill-health. He has a chronic duodenal ulcer and is subject to dysentery. And this has made him old and frail before his time. Recently, when stricken with severe malaria, he refused to be treated with quinine since the peasants could not afford it. Is it any wonder that seeing this elderly saint slowly but surely ruining his health in their service, these same peasants should hold him in veneration?

Rich too adore him

But it is not only the poor who look on Vinobaji as a man of God. He touches the conscience of the wealthy as well. He approaches them in a spirit of loving conciliation. They are lucky, he says, for it is more blessed to give than to receive. And as the givers of land they are ennobled while the landless

are merely the passive recipients of their rights. Not that Vinobaji is unduly tender to the susceptibilities of the rich. From a large landlord for instance he refuses anything less than 1/6th of his best property. He would rather have no land at all than land given merely as a sop to public opinion. The gift must spring from a change of heart. And so, the landlords greet Vinobaji with garlands on his entry into a new village but they smile a little sheepishly at the prospect of being fleeced.

To the Communist Vinobaji also speaks words of affection. He says, "If you would give up class hatred and truly work for the good of all, I would be the first to join you." And despite official Communist denunciations of his work, in some areas leading party members have contributed land. His approach is the same to all men, whatever their creed and conviction. An effort to reach the divine spark which he believes them to possess and then to make real to them the needs of their fellows in a language they understand.

... knows 16 languages

This ideal he has put quite literally into practice. Vinobaji has taught himself no less than 16 languages. At 46 he learned both Persian and Arabic so as to be able to converse more freely with his Muslim neighbours.

Vinobaji has acquired his strength through renunciation, much as India's ancient sages were supposed to acquire magical powers through their austerities. Vinobaji's magic is singleness of purpose and an iron will. There are many stories about his will-power. At the age of ten he is said to have sworn a vow of chastity from which he has never swerved. At the age of twenty when he joined Gandhiji's rural centre he took his certificates and diplomas—and be-

ing a brilliant scholar and mathematician he had many—and burned them one by one in the flame of an oil lamp, in spite of his mother's horrified protests. A few years later, at this same beloved mother's death he refused to attend her funeral, since the pyre would be lit by a Brahmin; and Vinobaji, although himself born an orthodox Brahmin, had come to disapprove of the caste system. When he joined Gandhiji, the Mahatmaji told him to simplify life, Vinobaji took his words to heart. He vowed to wear no more than one garment at a time and to forego salt, the last remaining condiment which he allowed himself.

But with all his asceticism, Vinobaji has resisted pride of poverty—that subtlest temptation of the saints. He has never urged anyone else to follow his way of life. And he goes his own way with a striking serenity. To someone who asked him if his work would succeed, he replied, "Fire merely burns. It does not care whether anyone puts a pot on it, fills it with water and puts rice in it to make a meal. To burn is the limit of its duty."

The Spartan way

Out on the mission of course fellow pilgrims have to share his spartan routine. At 3-30 a.m. twelve dry and commanding handclaps echo brusquely through the huts where the mission is sleeping—guest of a poor Muslim or Untouchable as often as of a wealthy landlord. They pack up camp, then at 4 a.m. they assemble for prayers and silent spinning. In half an hour they set off on foot for their next stopping-place. When day breaks they halt for a roadside breakfast, vegetarian and spare like all their meals. A crowd gathers, and while he eats Vinobaji chats with the people and listens to their problems. By 10 a.m. the party has reached the village where it will stay till next morning. Vinobaji settles under a tree to spin and summons the local landlords.

If they seem apathetic, he shakes a gentle skinny forefinger at them and reminds them of the horror and violence that will sweep the country unless the peasants get their rights. In the evening a meeting takes place in a shed specially decorated with flowers and votive lamps. It starts with prayers. Then the landlords are invited to declare how much land they are ready to give. Perhaps there is not enough offered to meet the needs of all the landless. If so Vinobaji asks the landless themselves to choose the most deserving, and at the same time encourage the landlords to make their donations bigger. At one place an untouchable who owned only 13th of an acre offered his tiny plot, since he had just got a job in a nearby factory. Vinobaji gravely took a gift-deed from him, then endorsed it to the effect that since he belonged to the class to whom land should be given, his plot should be returned to him forthwith.

Scenes like that arouse an atmosphere of almost evangelical fervour. People start trying to outdo each other in generosity. But Vinobaji is careful to canalise the flood of emotion. He sits by as level-headed as ever; garlanded like an emaciated and reluctant Cæsar. Then he sets up a village committee to supervise the cultivation of the distributed land and to obtain seeds and implements from the Government officials. From those receiving land he extracts a pledge that they will not resell for ten years. By 8 o'clock p.m. the meeting is usually over, and an hour later the pilgrims retire to sleep. They have to be on the move again at 3-30 the next morning. Vinobaji shuns publicity. He will almost certainly tick me off for talking about him like this. He himself has refused to be interviewed on the air. He has said that if Gandhiji had not been assassinated he would never have dared to come out of his retirement. Yet he is no mere imitator of Gandhiji. In

India where saints—and specially dead saints—exercise an enormous, even a paralysing influence on peoples' minds, one might have expected Vinobaji to disguise himself in the mantle which others claim to have fallen on his shoulders. He does not. He rarely speaks of Gandhiji in public. He has his own dignity, emphasis and methods. Like a candle, lit at a neighbouring flame, he now burns with a steady and separate light.

In contrast to most ascetics too Vinobaji believes in the future and in humankind. He once said, "People call this an age of sin and degradation, yet how can that be? The Buddha is supposed to have lived in a time freer from sin than our own. Yet someone as great as he had to pay a heap of gold for nothing but a small parcel of land. While I, a mere humble devotee of God, have been entrusted with thousands of acres as free gifts."

Vinobaji is the embodiment of India. In spite of his wide culture and learning Westerners might find him less easy to approach than Gandhiji. When first I met him I thought him reserved, almost remote. When he spoke, his simple, unsophisticated language, suited to an audience of illiterate peasants, fell oddly on the jaded ears of Europe. Yet most great spirits have shaped their message to conditions no less restricted. My last glimpse of Vinobaji was the same as my first. He was squatting outside his mud hut, bent like a scholar over his spindle. A group of peasants crouched round him expecting guidance and help. He was talking to them in his quiet courteous way. And I thought, it will be the same to-morrow and the day after that until he dies. And there was something about the image that this thought conjured up, something in the enormous tranquillity of his patience and his faith, which told me that Vinobaji's

A Portrait Sketch

message was not limited to the country in which it was uttered. The twentieth century may be rich in jet aeroplanes, but it is pretty poor in saints. We need to remember that what we call 'progress' is nothing if it leads to no corresponding inner change, and Vinobaji gives us this reminder in the one way which has power to move and impress. By the example of a life and character utterly dedicated to the service of his fellows and the God he believes to be revealed in them.

*A talk broadcast in the
B.B.C. Home Service*

KARMAYOGI VINOBA

By

P. D. Tandon

Karmayogi Vinoba has captured the imagination of the country. In the surrounding gloom, he is a ray of hope. Peasantry looks to him as their saviour, land-lords willingly respond to his appeal. The government approves of his Bhoomidan Yajna and give it some support. The warring political parties swear allegiance to him in his noble task and have deep respect for him. He wanders about from place to place and attracts huge crowds. This kindred soul shames the selfish by his selflessness. He does not want the people to give land to the poor in pity or in compassion, but believes that like air and water, land too, is a free gift of God for humanity and each son of His must get land for his need. He once said, "The land belongs to God, like air and water, and it is foolish to suppose it can belong for ever to one class of people alone. Gain merit by giving land free".

Vinoba has conquered his self. He is a life long Brahmachari. He is sea-green incorruptible. Nothing can lure him. He leads the life of a Yogi and believes in complete effacement of one's ownself. He is a well-wisher of the rich and poor both. He is a true disciple of the Mahatma and is keeping the torch of non-violence burning, when the flames of violence seem to be over-whelming the world. His Bhudan Yajna is a big experiment and a unique movement. It may not solve the land problem, but it has created an atmosphere in the country of which the government should take full advantage and help the poor. Some time back Vinoba described this movement in these memorable words, "This Bhudan Yajna (land gift mission) is an application of non-violence, an experiment in transformation of life itself. I am only an

experiment in the handle of Him, who is the Lord of all Ages, like even those who give and those who will receive the gifts. It is the phenomenon inspired by God. For how otherwise can people who fight even for a foot of land be inspired to give away hundreds of acres of land freely?"

Very little is known about Vinoba's childhood. He was the eldest son of his parents. This scholar, yogi, philosopher, poet and writer, always led a life of purity and austerity. His name was Vinayak and he left home at an early age. He has inherited many qualities from his parents and grand-parents who were great worshippers and austerity-lovers. They believed that all human beings were the children of God and there should be no distinction between man and man and their temples were open to every one. An unheard of thing in those days. His grand-father, Shambhu Rao used to invite Muslim singers to sing divine songs before the deity. He was a voracious reader of newspapers even in his childhood and had a good library at home. He had dived deep into the oceans of religious literature at an early age and that had considerable influence on him. He is the master of about eighteen languages. Once his mother told him that she did not follow the Gita in Sanskrit and enquired if there was no translation of it in Marathi. This prompted Vinoba to translate the Gita in Marathi. He did so and the book was called Gitai and it has a high place in Marathi literature.

Vinoba is Gandhiji's discovery. He fully realised the great potentialities of his disciple and was tremendously impressed by him. Gandhiji wrote the following to Vinoba several years ago "I do not know what adjectives I should use for you. Your love and purity of character overwhelms me. I am incapable of testing you." Vinoba is a monument of austerity and self determination. He never accepted Gandhiji's

views unless he was fully convinced of them. Bapu often sought his opinions on various important matters. He considered Vinoba an authority on non-violence. He is deeply religious and is a profound scholar of the Gita, the Quran, and the Bible. He makes an abiding impression on religious people, be they Padris, or Pandits or Maulvis.

Bharatan Kumarappa wrote, "Vinoba, one felt was the ripe fruit of the deep spirituality and religious experience of our country and, therefore, it was that all kinds of people with the most diverse viewpoints gave him almost instinctive respect and hearing. It was an education to be with him from day to day and to know him at close range."

Vinoba owes much to his mother Rakhumai, who taught him many devotional songs and who created in him a longing for scriptures. She died in 1918 and Vinoba had joined Gandhiji in her life time. In his early years, he one day burnt all his certificates in an oven and said that he had no use for them. His mother was startled at the performance, but did not say much about it. He had been living with Gandhiji and his parents had no knowledge of it as he had left his home when he was young. When Bapu came to know of it, he did not approve of it and wrote the following letter to Vinoba's parents, "Your Vinoba is with me. Your son has developed unusual brilliancy of character and saintliness for his age. I had to undergo several years' self discipline for achieving this." In this letter Gandhiji, it is said, used the word "Vinoba" for Vinayak and now the world knows him as Vinoba.

Vinoba is Gandhiji's moral heir. His achievements at Telengana will adorn the pages of history. He has a mission to fulfil and let us hope God will give him the necessary strength for it. His devotion

to causes and integrity of purpose can be the envy of saints. He is an effective speaker and hardly ever repeats himself. His approach to problems is refreshing. This matchless, devoted disciple of Gandhiji always lives on a high moral plane. This Yogi, with Gandhian loin-cloth and Tolstoyan beard is marching on from place to place in search of land for the landless. May his mission be successful and the will of God be done.

THE BHOODAN MOVEMENT

by

PAT McMOHAN

[Miss Pat McMohan is an American and joined Vinoba's walking party in September 1952 after spending three months in Sewagram. Since then she has been following Vinoba in his Bihar tour. She has learnt Hindi and is now working for Bhoodan in the villages of Gaya, asking people for land. Vinoba, appreciating her courage and spirit of selfless service, referred to her work in his post-prayer speech at Banwariya (Gaya) and said, "My daughter Pat has travelled thousands of miles to come to India, observed our daily routine and wonderfully adjusted herself to the Indian way of life. She has set an example before our workers".

This article was written by her on the request of a Japanese friend for a Japanese paper.]

In 1951, I left the University of Michigan discouraged and alarmed by world events. As a student of social psychology, I was determined to find why India, the most poverty-stricken country, could find strength for a bloodless revolution, a detached foreign policy and an active self-improvement programme while most "have not" countries were still oppressed and involved in violent dissension.

After arriving in India in order to find my education through practical experience, I have lived in institutions, worked with students building a village road, with a teacher and primary pupils constructing a mud school, and lastly and most important, travelled over 2,000 miles with Vinoba Bhave's land collection movement, going on foot through villages, jungles,

Vinoba Bhave

cities, centres of ancient culture; living in temples, schools, and homes.

From these efforts has come the knowledge of a more advanced way of life, the simplicity of the old village culture where people welcome strangers as they welcome their children, the selfless idealism of the villager giving land to the poor, the loving attention of the family for its young. Of course, unpleasant knowledge has come as well of purdah, bigoted people who consider work undignified, landlords treated as Gods, Indians turned against their countrymen adopting the values of the British.

But once awhile some moving experience newly reminds me with a shock that there is a force stirring in this country that may jolt the world. A few days ago, a thin man in yellowed, once white clothes, his skin and bones showing through the tears, bowed before Vinoba and presented all his land to be given to the poor. When the poor can give to the poorer, leaving themselves nothing but their strength to do other work, what greater motivation and trust are necessary?

In this age of wary scepticism, we find the new hope that in days of facing great social problems we shall stand about like men in a burning house, each unwilling to burn himself putting out the fire that is about to consume all. In India one man assumed the responsibility for "putting out the fire". To solve the problems facing India—children unclothed, unfed, villagers digging little pits in dry river beds to find clean water, walking a mile to bring water from slimy green pools, men without land and without work, Vinoba Bhave has taken drastic steps which leave no doubt about his sincerity.

He has left his home for ever to walk until land is distributed to the poor. He will take land, wealth, or labour donations from the poor as well as the rich.

If he does not receive the first time, he or his workers will go again and again. Every individual has a right to those things that are necessary to his survival. Eating is as necessary as breathing and drinking; water, air and sunlight are free, why not land? And how can the rich refuse, when the poor give?

He accepts any workers, of any background or beliefs. He asks them to consider themselves first as human beings. Members of all India's parties have come to him, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists. Many have told him that these people are working in this movement to gain prestige. His reply was, "Let them come. There is no harm in prestige from good work. Need I go and ask them?"

It has been my luck to observe one of the most successful attempts in applied social psychology of the age. Vinoba Bhave has not only managed to get dissenting parties to co-operate towards the same goal and settled innumerable disputes, but now that the movement has gained momentum, in less than three weeks he has gathered 3,70,000 acres of land. Approximately 70,000 peasants, living near starvation, shall be able to grow their own food; wells are being dug; bullocks and labour have been given for land reclamation.

As we tramp along the road, we are met by large arches of mango leaves, handed garlands, deafened by blasts of long pipe-stemmed horns, peacock tailed drums, conch shells, singing and shouting. Between villages we meet people on their way to market, peasants in the field, pilgrims on their way to religious festivals. After a morning walk of 10 or 15 miles, we stop in a village, city or town, and local people give us our breakfast and a place to stay. All during the day workers come and go, travelling from village to village, or house to house, bringing forms describing the land given. Crowds of people stand in the win-

Vinoba Bhave

dows, doors watching us as we work. In the evening there are meetings of a few hundreds or a hundred thousand and the names of the donors or villages will be read.

Leaving this movement will be jumping off a moving train. Every day brings a new idea, a new experience. A movement that was once only one man's determination to undertake his nation's problems, though he might accomplish little and it should take until the day of his death, is now a movement of the nation, with workers in every province giving a year of their time to speed up his programme. It has been a wonderful inspiration for me, and for those who are discontented and disillusioned with "magic" formulas, it stands a bright, new challenge.